

# 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 three new EIP-AGRI Focus Groups. The Focus Groups will start working in October 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 per 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 others<sup>1</sup> are invited to apply for participation in Focus Groups on the following topics:

### **26: Moving from source to sink in arable farming**

[More info](#)

### **27: Circular Horticulture**

[More info](#)

### **28: Enhancing production and use of renewable energy on the farm**

[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 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](#).

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<sup>1</sup> 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 26: Moving from source to sink in arable farming**

First meeting: **29-30 November 2017**

*Agriculture is highly exposed to climate change, as farming activities directly depend on climatic conditions. Changes in agricultural practices and climatic variations may have complex effects on the processes that underpin agricultural systems.*

*The agricultural activity itself contributes significantly to greenhouse gas emissions. Inappropriate agricultural practices might contribute to generating emissions when soils are disturbed and their capacity to store is decreased. At the same time, agriculture can significantly contribute to climate change mitigation by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and by storing carbon in plants, forests and soils.*

*Arable soils are on average low in organic matter content, and this provides a great potential to increase carbon storage. The soil capacity to store carbon depends on a wide range of interrelated factors influencing soil structure. Soil structure can be improved by appropriate management techniques (e.g. soil amendments, crop rotation, cover crops and tillage). Good arable farmland management practices can contribute to balancing the overall agricultural contribution to climate change. The restoration of soil organic matter, in particular, could contribute to a potential large-scale carbon sink.*

**QUESTION: Which cost effective farm management practices and tools could foster and ensure long lasting carbon storage in arable farming contributing to climate change mitigation?**

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

- Take stock of the current practices and tools which could foster long lasting carbon storage in soils and improve soil quality in the different geographical and climatic conditions of the EU. Identify challenges and opportunities.
- Collect good practices and success stories from different European areas, especially focussing on farmers' and advisers' experiences.
- Compare different management practices taking into account the feasibility and cost-effectiveness at farm level.
- Identify success factors (such as knowledge requirements, partnerships) and technical/economic/social barriers, or fail factors, concerning the adoption of practices fostering carbon storage in arable farming.
- Discuss how these practices may be transferred to other conditions (location, type of production).
- Suggest innovative solutions and provide ideas for EIP-AGRI Operational Groups and other innovative projects.
- Take stock of the state of play of research. Identify needs from practice and possible gaps in knowledge concerning carbon storage capacity in arable farming which may be solved by further research.

## **Focus Group 27: Circular Horticulture**

First meeting: **29-30 November 2017**

*Protected horticulture, specifically the cultivation of vegetables, small fruits, flowering and ornamental plants, is a highly specialised production system that requires specific infrastructure such as greenhouses and uses specific techniques. It is often considered to be very resource-intensive, especially when plants are grown on substrate and supports for instance, using water combined with nutrients and pesticides, under plastic or glass roofs and in a controlled climate (temperature, CO<sub>2</sub>).*

*Highly controlled production systems mean that circularity can be achieved for inputs such as water and the nutrients as well as for technical material for production and post-production (e.g. substrate, plastic, minerals). The fact that horticulture is often conducted in clusters of farms and in dedicated areas also leads to possibilities for economies of scale both at production and post-production stages.*

*From the design of the production infrastructure, to the production processes and waste management, approaches to “close loops” require growers in horticulture to adopt new practices and take into account new business models. The Focus Group will tackle “circular horticulture” in the context of resource efficiency through a better re-use or re-cycling of both inputs and by-products, in line with the [EU Circular Economy Action Plan](#) .*

*The Focus Group will look at examples of good practice and how these can be transferred to other situations to benefit the wider sector. It will also look at success and fail factors for circular approaches in horticulture, identify knowledge gaps and possible future research needs. Re-use of water and recycling of nutrients is the subject of a specific Thematic Network under EU funding (FERTINNOWA). The Focus Group will be able to build on the work of this Thematic Network. The Focus Group will address both conventional and organic systems.*

### **QUESTION: How to increase circularity in protected horticulture?**

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

- Assess existing practices in protected horticulture and their potential to better re-use or recycle water, materials and by-products, identify good practices and success stories from different parts of Europe, taking into account different climatic conditions, agro systems and specifically focusing on farmers' and advisers' experiences.
- Compare different management practices taking into account the feasibility and cost-effectiveness at individual farm level or through collective approaches, and identify success factors (such as knowledge requirements, crucial partnerships) and technical/economic barriers, or other fail factors.
- Identify how these practices may be transferred to other conditions (location, type of production) and how.
- Identify tools to help farmers and advisers assess the opportunities for re-use and re-cycling of resource inputs at farm and regional levels.
- Identify innovative business models for horticultural enterprises
- Identify further research needs from practice, possible gaps in technical knowledge, and further research needs.
- Suggest innovative solutions and provide ideas for EIP-AGRI Operational Groups and other innovative projects.

## **Focus Group 28: Enhancing production and use of renewable energy on the farm**

First meeting: **21-22 November 2017**

*The Paris Agreement gives a clear and ambitious direction for investment into low carbon innovation. The implementation of the EU's ambitious Paris climate change commitments is now the priority and depends to a large extent on the successful transition to a clean energy system as two thirds of greenhouse gas emissions result from energy production and use.*

*Many different forms of renewable energy are produced in rural areas and many small and medium scale installations provide opportunities for new cooperation in production, selling and distribution of renewable energy. They bring employment and economic development in rural areas, replace fossil fuels and contribute to energy security. This ranges from wind, solar, geothermal to different forms of bioenergy. The latter even represent a large proportion of our renewable energy mix, and will continue to do so in the future. Energy production at local and regional level ranges from local combined heat and power (CHP) plants to biogas plants using different feedstocks and feedstock mixes, which may come from regionally available forest or agricultural raw materials.*

*The Focus Group will address ways to enhance the production and use of energy at farm level and in rural areas and to seek best solutions and innovative approaches, including close cooperation in this field between farmers and other actors in rural areas.*

### **QUESTION: How to enhance production and use of renewable energy on the farm?**

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

- identify the main practical challenges and opportunities posed by the production and use of renewable energy at farm level;
- identify main practical barriers to sourcing of materials (forest biomass, agricultural biomass - with potential focus on agricultural residues - solar, geothermal and wind), transportation and collection (e.g. on farm, to local biogas plants etc.), transformation to energy, and distribution to farms and on farms as well as to public grids;
- identify new and best practices and tools that can be applied at farm level to increase both the production and self-consumption of renewable energy in a cost-efficient manner, while ensuring that renewable energy sourcing meets the sustainability criteria;
- examine the trade-offs between all types of on-farm energy production and alternative uses (food, feed, other non-food);
- analyse possible synergies between use of various energy sources (agriculture, forest, solar, wind) and demand on farm level (constant and stable supply);
- propose potential innovative actions to stimulate the knowledge and use of management practices and strategies for improving uptake of renewable energy and provide inspiration and ideas for Operational Groups and other innovative projects;
- develop collective selling approaches for farm-produced energy – links to economic opportunities for territorial developments and networking activities for dissemination of these approaches;
- identify remaining research, innovation, advisory and other needs coming from farm level to improve the use as well as the production of renewable energy on farm holdings;
- provide examples of practices and tools that are already applied, including through better stakeholder involvement and synergies with other sectors such as tourism.



# 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 6 September 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 4 October 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 e-mail address on the EIP-AGRI website. The applicants also agree to register to the EIP-AGRI website to facilitate the Focus Group work.

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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 20 groups are now closed, and it is not possible to join them.

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



## Table of contents (indicative number of pages between brackets)

1. Executive summary (1p.)
2. Introduction (0,5 p)
3. Brief description of the process (0,5 p)
4. State of play (7 p.)
  - a. Framing key issues
  - b. Good practices
  - c. Success and fail factors
5. What can we do? Recommendations: [*most elaborated part and heart of the report*] (7 p.)
  - a. Ideas for Operational Groups
  - b. Research needs from practice
  - c. Other recommendations, including improving take up
6. Annexes
  - a. Good practices and case studies
  - b. Members of the Focus Group
  - c. List of mini-papers
  - d. Relevant research projects

# 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.