

eip-agri
AGRICULTURE & INNOVATION

Collaborate to innovate

Operational Groups networking across the EU

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This brochure has been produced within the framework of the European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability (EIP-AGRI), which was launched by the European Commission to promote innovation in the agricultural and forestry sectors and to better connect research and practice.

This brochure contains case studies of Operational Groups. More examples can be found in the EIP-AGRI Operational Groups booklets on the EIP-AGRI website. Find all information on www.eip-agri.eu





► Collaborate to innovate

EIP-AGRI Operational Groups are innovative projects that aim to find practical solutions to problems or opportunities which European farmers and foresters are currently facing. Operational Groups bring together partners with complementary knowledge, such as farmers, researchers, farm advisers, agribusinesses and others. More than 3200 Operational Groups are planned by national and regional Rural Development Programmes for the period 2014-2020. Throughout Europe, about 600 Operational Group projects (March 2018) have been selected or have already started, and this number is growing quickly.

Operational Groups can benefit from networking and collaborating with organisations from outside their own project and from other regions and countries, such as other Operational Groups, research projects, farmers' organisations or local authorities and European knowledge networks. Whether it is meeting at events or on farms, exchanging knowledge on similar topics over the phone, hearing about personal experiences in running innovation projects, or setting up a more formal collaboration agreement, Operational Groups can reap the benefits of national or international networking in different ways.

This brochure shows some examples of successful collaboration. It provides Operational Groups with inspiration and tools for further knowledge exchange within the EIP-AGRI network.





INCREASING THE SCOPE FOR KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

With about 600 Operational Group projects selected or having started (March 2018), more and more are reaching out to other Operational Groups, either from the same region or country or from elsewhere. National Rural Networks, Managing Authorities and the EIP-AGRI Network organise networking events to encourage these connections. Participating in these events can help meet other Operational Groups that are working on similar themes or that may offer ideas for dealing with project-related challenges. They may even help Operational Groups find partners or new ways of sharing results directly with farmers in the field.



Working together for cork oak sustainability

The flathead oak borer (*Coraeus undatus*) is one of the main pests attacking cork oak forests in the Mediterranean region. The beetle digs tunnels in the cork tissue, making the cork less suitable for the production of cork stoppers. This has a huge economic impact on cork producers and the cork industry. The Portuguese Operational Group UNDERCORK is working on the development of methods to monitor and control flathead oak borer populations and reduce attacks. "We pay special attention to networking with other cork oak-related Operational Groups", says Nuno Calado from lead partner UNAC (Union of Mediterranean forests). We attend joint meetings to get to know each other, to see what kind of activities each Operational Group has planned, and to discuss ways to improve our cooperation."

UNDERCORK is also stepping beyond Portugal's borders, establishing a close cooperation with a Spanish group developing an Operational Group project that is addressing the same pest problem. "We actively participate in meetings where we can discuss our work, contribute with our expertise and share ideas. We want to support each other in sharing project results through digital platforms, like our website and newsletter, to reach more partners, forest owners, and others from the Portuguese and Spanish cork industries. I think there is a strong common interest in working together. We share our results but also the problems we encounter, working side by side as much as possible."

► UNDERCORK presented a poster at the Agri-Innovation Summit in Lisbon (October 2017). [Browse the project catalogue](#) to find out more about UNDERCORK and other Operational Groups.





Finding opportunities at networking events

"We attended several workshops that were organised by the Portuguese National Rural Network a few years ago", says Maria do Carmo Martins from the Portuguese organisation COTHN (National Fruit and Vegetable Technological Operating Centre). These events were especially useful for us to find partners from research, to help us tackle concrete problems from fruit and vegetable producers. Afterwards, we were invited by coordinators of several potential Operational Groups who later supported us in sharing project results directly to producers."

Visit the COTHN website for more information: www.cothn.pt



How does the EIP-AGRI network support you to exchange knowledge?

► EIP-AGRI workshops, seminars and Focus Groups bring people, such as farmers, scientists and local authorities, together from across the agricultural innovation landscape. At each of these events, participants from different European countries and regions deal with questions related to innovation, on a specific agricultural theme.

TIP: You can contact the people who attended our events. Participants' e-mail addresses are listed in the official participants lists on the [EIP-AGRI website](#).

TIP: Focus Group members can be contacted [through the EIP-AGRI website](#).

► On the [EIP-AGRI website](#) you can find people or projects with whom you can exchange knowledge. You can search on the basis of a specific agricultural sector, country, profession,...

TIP: You need to [register to the EIP-AGRI website](#) if you want to search for people.



Operational Groups can also benefit from exchanging knowledge with people involved in other types of groups and projects, such as Horizon 2020 multi-actor projects or producers' organisations. They can give them new ideas, knowledge or possible solutions for the issues they are dealing with. They can help share results, reach a wider range of people and spread information at European level.

ArboNovateur – Sustainable innovation for fruit growers

For fruit producers in the French Tarn-et-Garonne area, efficient water management is essential, especially in dry periods. The French Operational Group ArboNovateur is exploring irrigation systems and decision tools that can help apple, plum, grape and kiwi producers to use water more efficiently. They are also looking for solutions to limit the use of pesticides. Project partners include fruit farmers, agricultural school farms and Chambers of Agriculture, who help spread project results to fruit producers in the region.

“Local producers’ organisations and regional authorities who are not partners in the Operational Group are also sharing results to reach farmers, local communities and consumers”, says farm adviser Jean-François Larrieu. “We want to show consumers that we are producing healthy and safe food in a sustainable way. Local authorities have for instance disseminated information at local schools and organised events where we presented our activities to local consumers.

We are also learning from other Operational Groups and have planned a study visit to an Operational Group from the Italian region of Emilia-Romagna to meet the local producers from that area.”

More information: <http://www.arbonovateur.fr>



On the EIP-AGRI website, did you know that...

- ▶ You can [look for interesting projects](#)?
- ▶ There is an [Operational Groups section](#) containing information on all Operational Groups?
- ▶ You can [download publications](#) that include Operational Groups and other innovation projects working on specific themes, such as organic farming, supply chains, forestry and more?
- ▶ Every month the [EIP-AGRI newsletter](#) highlights inspirational ideas?



Connecting with Horizon 2020 thematic networks

Horizon 2020 thematic networks collect knowledge and best practices ready to be applied in the field. They can play an important role in bringing together partners from Operational Groups, from Horizon 2020 research projects and others, to stimulate knowledge exchange.



Thematic network EuroDairy collects innovations and best practice in European dairy farming. Coordinator

Ray Keatinge: *"We encourage farmer-to-farmer learning and organise activities that focus on real farm needs. In October 2016 we organised a three-day visit to the Netherlands for farmers from an English Operational Group working on reducing antimicrobial use. They met Dutch farmers and experts, visited farms and became interested in trying out some of the techniques they had seen. To complete the loop, we will be revisiting two farmers from this Group to see which innovations they have implemented."*

► www.eurodairy.eu



Spyros Fountas from H2020 thematic network Smart AKIS: *"We organise workshops to share information on available Smart Farming Technologies and to encourage farmers, researchers, advisers and others to set up Operational Groups or other collaboration initiatives. Thematic networks offer Operational Groups information on the latest agricultural innovations, and help them identify others working on similar topics."*

► www.smart-akis.com





COLLABORATING ACROSS BORDERS



Some countries are encouraging cross-border collaboration by including this opportunity in their calls for Operational Groups. Estonia launched a dedicated call for cross-border Operational Groups in December 2017. Konstantin Mihhejev from the Estonian National Rural Network: "Many Estonian farmers, researchers and small entrepreneurs had told us that they had a clear need and interest in cooperating with partners from other countries. It can help them to develop new technologies, products or potential markets with the help of Operational Group partners from abroad. As a result of our first call we received four applications, including potential cooperation partners from Finland and Italy. We are very happy with this result. These partnerships will create further opportunities to achieve good results within the frame of the project, and to disseminate results more broadly at EU level."

► More information: [website of the Estonian NRN](#)



"In the German state of Schleswig-Holstein, a local Operational Group has been working with an Irish expert to improve pasture management. The group's positive experience has encouraged the Managing Authority to include opportunities for international cooperation in their next call. Other Managing Authorities may do the same. If you would like to set up an Operational Group, I recommend contacting your national or regional authority to find out more about the possibilities for international cooperation."

**- Konstantin Mihhejev,
Estonian National Rural Network -**



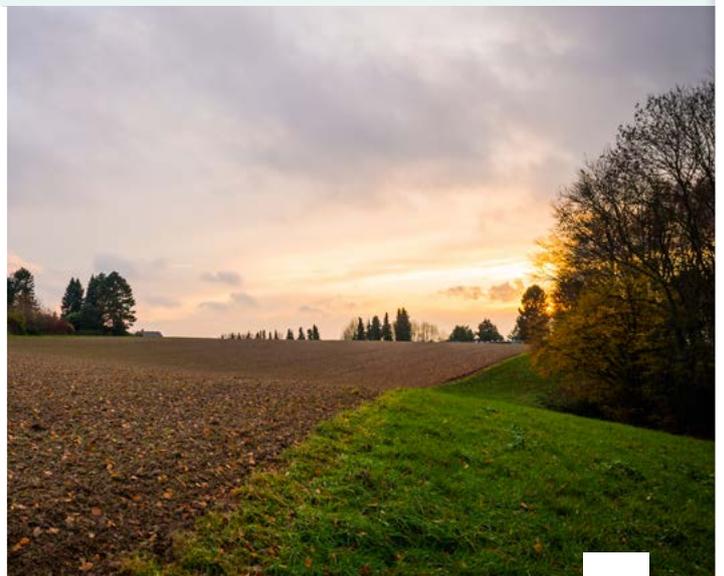


German and Dutch partners joining forces in an Operational Group

An Operational Group from North Rhine-Westphalia in Germany is helping German organic farmers to prevent nutrient loss in their soils. A research institute from neighbouring country the Netherlands is a partner in this Operational Group. "The Louis Bolk Institute had developed a nitrogen calculator for organic and conventional agriculture", says Operational Group coordinator Rachel Fischer. "The calculator model uses data on local weather, local soil structures, yield and fertiliser input, which is why we couldn't just use the Dutch version. Researchers from the Institute are now helping us adjust the model to the situation in North Rhine-Westphalia, specifically for organic farming. The tool will provide a useful support for farmers and advisers involved in nutrient management."

Rachel is convinced that a transnational cooperation has many advantages: "This cross-border partnership has helped us a lot - and not only in the development of the calculator. We discovered that our partners from the Louis Bolk Institute had already conducted research on many issues that are also relevant to us, and vice versa. It definitely benefited us to look across the border."

► More information on the Operational Group 'Nutrient management and long-term growth in yield in organic market farms': www.netzwerk-laendlicher-raum.de or in the EIP-AGRI [Operational Groups database](#).





SUPPORT TO HELP YOU CONNECT

Operational Groups can receive support from national or regional Managing Authorities and Network Support Units, which share information, organise events to bring partners together and may also provide brokering services.

Sharing experiences in Finland

The Finnish Rural Network Support Unit (NSU) has organised an event where partners from newly set up Operational Groups had the opportunity to mix and mingle with already ongoing ones. Juha-Matti Markkola from the Finnish NSU: "We wanted to give our Operational Groups the opportunity to network with each other, because many of them are working on similar themes. This type of peer-to-peer learning is especially useful for the new projects, and we want to stimulate a kind of mentorship that can actually benefit all of them. The get-together was a good opportunity to hear experiences and have open discussions. The Operational Group partners also had the chance to talk directly to the Managing Authority and Paying Agency, and ask them about things that aren't clear."

► More information will be shared on the website www.maaseutu.fi

The Network Support Unit of the Scottish Rural Network has set up an innovation support service that guides farmers and foresters in preparing EIP-AGRI innovation projects. "We bring farmers with an innovative idea into contact with an innovation broker, who then brings in others from the supply chain and beyond, depending on what is needed. This group is then assisted in defining and reflecting on potential solutions, and finally in preparing a project plan with the option to apply for RDP funding if need be."

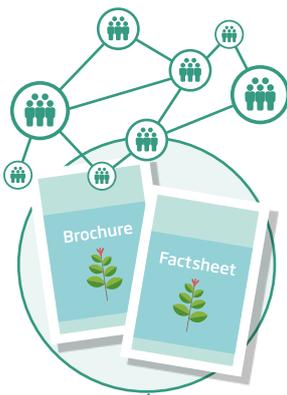
- **Alistair Prior, Head of the Rural Network Support Unit** -

► **More information:**
<https://www.innovativefarmers.org/welcometoriss>



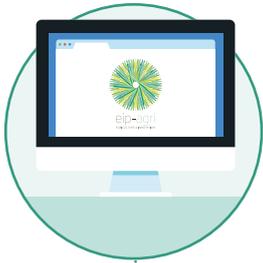


► EIP-AGRI networking tools



The EIP-AGRI Network can help you make a connection with different Operational Groups, potential project partners, Horizon 2020 research projects, Managing Authorities, and other cooperation partners.

EIP-AGRI events regularly bring together Operational Groups that work on similar themes. All information from such events is shared on [the EIP-AGRI website](#). Details on the Operational Groups that were represented at some of the events can be found in a number of EIP-AGRI [booklets](#).



Through the [Meeting Point](#) on the EIP-AGRI website, you can find partners to collaborate with, connect with Operational Group members and share knowledge and ideas. The EIP-AGRI website has an [area dedicated to Operational Groups](#). It brings together publications, news items and inspirational ideas from across the EIP-AGRI website that are especially relevant for Operational Groups, so you can easily browse information on topics you are interested in.



The [Operational Groups database](#) is a unique EU repository which provides information on Operational Groups that have been set up, including contact details, and results when they become available. The database is regularly updated with new projects.

www.eip-agri.eu:
the one-stop-shop for agricultural
innovation in Europe



STEPS IN THE OPERATIONAL GROUP PROCESS

- 1 Identify the problem or innovative idea
Find the right partners



- 2 Make a project plan
Complete the partnership
Prepare the RDP funding application



- 3 Start and run the project
Share intermediate results



- 4 Spread final results
Finalise project administration



COLLABORATING AND NETWORKING CAN HELP YOU IN EVERY STEP OF THE PROCESS



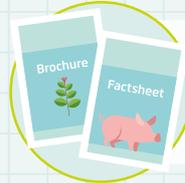
Get inspiration and new ideas



Find info and partners



Find support to make the application



Learn from the experiences of other Operational Groups



Exchange knowledge with other innovative projects, and European organisations and networks



Find new ways to share results directly to the field



Find useful tools and activities through the EIP-AGRI Network