

eip-agri
AGRICULTURE & INNOVATION



Operational Groups
Turning your idea into innovation
Update 2016

funded by



European
Commission

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More information: www.eip-agri.eu



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

The EIP-AGRI Service Point supports the EIP-AGRI network and its members through workshops and Focus Groups, events, publications, a monthly newsletter and the EIP-AGRI website, to help knowledge and innovation spread faster across European agriculture and forestry.

The case studies mentioned in this brochure were presented at the EIP-AGRI workshop "Operational Groups: First experiences", held in Italy in April 2016. All documents and presentations are available [in the events section of the EIP-AGRI website](#). For more details on the Operational Groups presented in this brochure, please see the [dedicated booklet on the EIP-AGRI website](#).

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Operational Groups: cooperate to innovate



Operational Groups: working together for real solutions

Innovation is essential for a competitive and sustainable European farming and forestry sector. EIP-AGRI Operational Groups (OGs) are groups of people who work together in an innovation project funded by Rural Development Programmes (RDPs). Operational Groups are the EIP-AGRI's main tool for turning innovative ideas into real solutions for the field.

Operational Groups bring together partners with complementary knowledge. The composition of the group can vary according to the theme and specific objectives of each project.

Farmers, advisers, scientists, businesses or other relevant partners work together to find practical solutions for specific problems facing people in the European farming and forestry sectors. Farmers and foresters need to be closely involved throughout the project to ensure that the innovative solutions are relevant and likely to be quickly applied in the field.

Operational Groups also share the project results with the broader EIP-AGRI network so that others with similar challenges across Europe can benefit from the outcomes.



Funding opportunities

EIP-AGRI Operational Groups are financed through Rural Development Programmes (2014-2020), which are managed nationally or regionally in EU countries.

Rural Development Programmes can provide:

- Financial support for setting up an EIP-AGRI Operational Group project (preparing the project)
- Funding for the project costs of an Operational Group project (implementing the project)
- Financial support for innovation support services

Please check with the national Managing Authority in your country or region for information on open calls to find out if there are specific requirements for building an Operational Group project. Your country's National Rural Network (NRN) can also provide more detailed information on setting up Operational Groups and finding partners.



You can find all contact details of Managing Authorities on the EIP-AGRI website:

<https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/content/managing-authorities-contact-details>



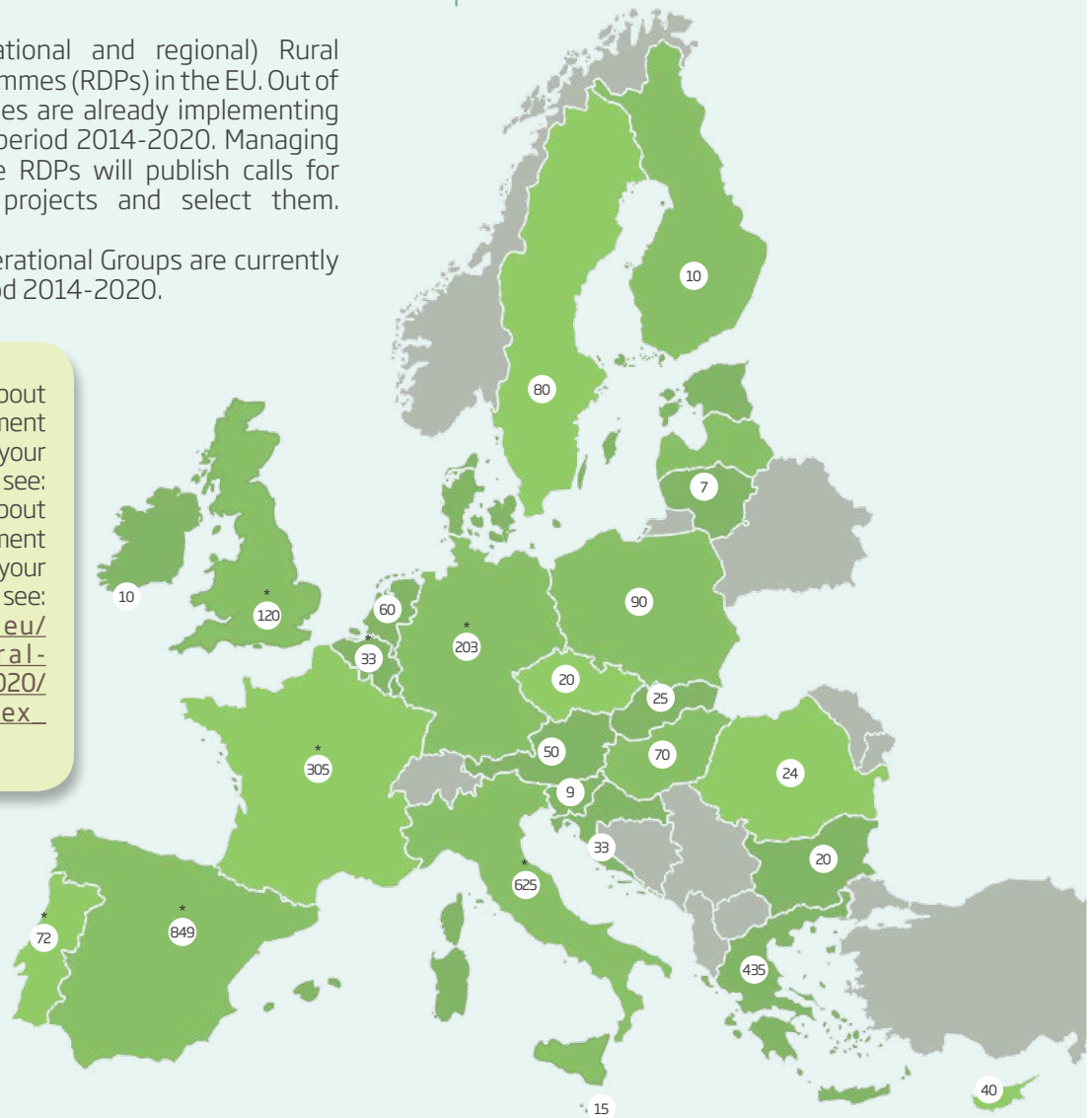


Some facts and figures

- There are 118 (national and regional) Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) in the EU. Out of these, 95 programmes are already implementing the EIP-AGRI in the period 2014-2020. Managing Authorities of these RDPs will publish calls for Operational Group projects and select them.
- More than 3200 Operational Groups are currently planned for the period 2014-2020.

To discover more about the Rural Development Programme in your country or region, see:
 To discover more about the Rural Development Programme in your country or region, see:
http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rural-development-2014-2020/country-files/index_en.htm

Number of planned EIP-AGRI Operational Groups in the 2014-2020 RDPs



* Sum of single RDPs

Update 19 May 2016 - source: European Commission



Innovation support services

It may be challenging to get an Operational Group started or to find partners with the right expertise. Innovation support services (ISS) can help with this process. They can also inform you about available funding and may even help you prepare project proposals.

- For more detailed information, read the [EIP-AGRI brochure on Innovation support services](#).



The Innovation Office EIP Agrar (Schleswig-Holstein, Germany) supports the Ministry of Agriculture in Kiel in preparing and facilitating EIP-AGRI innovation projects.

"People or groups who are interested in setting up an Operational Group project can contact us for advice on funding opportunities, on finding partners, and for answers to any administrative or other questions that they may have. We also assist them after the project has been approved, for example by offering individual advice and trainings." - **Carola Ketelhardt, Head of the Innovation Office EIP Agrar** -

More information:
<http://www.eip-agrar-sh.de/>



Bridging research and practice

Operational Groups that receive rural development funding are not research projects. They need to have a clear and practical innovation angle. However, they can still benefit from being involved in research projects, because they can offer knowledge that is useful for developing a specific practical solution.

The EU research framework Horizon 2020 funds multi-actor projects, which bring together researchers, farmers, advisers and businesses who work together with a clear focus on creating results that can be more easily used by farmers. Horizon 2020 also funds Thematic Networks, which collect existing scientific knowledge that is close to being put into practice, but which is not yet sufficiently known or understood by farmers for them to test or implement it. These projects can connect with Operational Groups and provide them with interesting information in their specific fields, and vice versa.

- For more information:
 - [EIP-AGRI brochure on Horizon 2020 -2017 calls](#)
 - [EIP-AGRI brochure on Thematic Networks](#)
 - [EIP-AGRI brochure on Other EU funding opportunities](#)



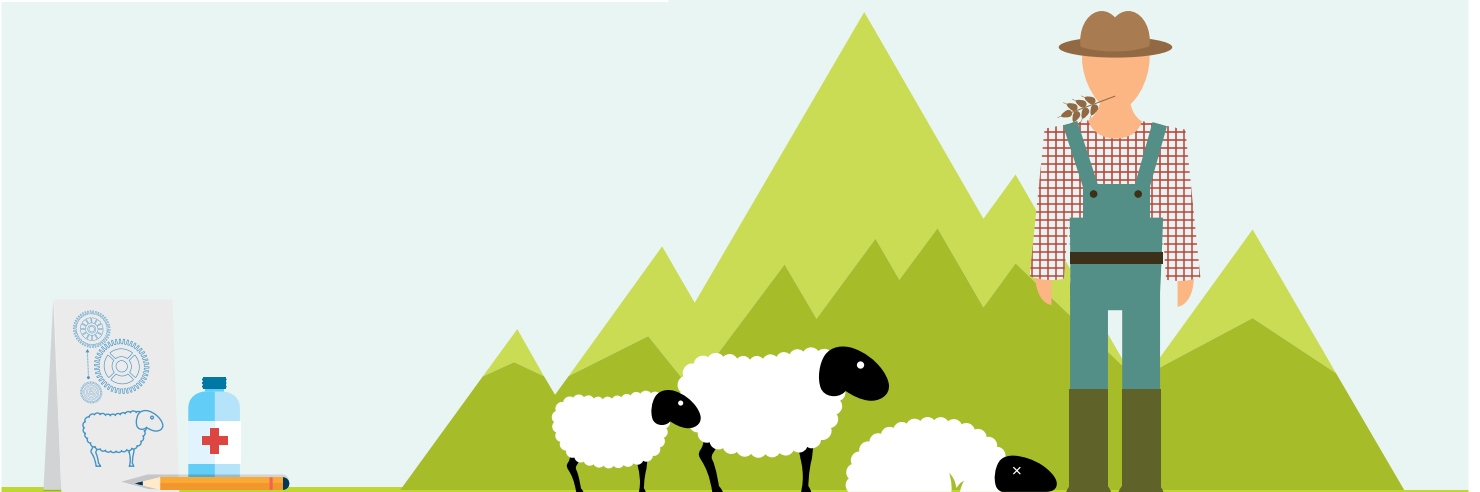
Setting up an Operational Group



To set up a successful Operational Group, it takes a good innovative idea, a solid plan, and the right partners. Every Operational Group starts by identifying the problem or designing the steps to test an innovative idea.

After having found the right people to build a strong and capable team, the OG partnership needs to draw up a plan, find information and funding, and write the project application.

The local Managing Authority, and innovation support services can help to complete this step successfully.





Identifying the problem or innovative idea

Every Operational Group starts by identifying a problem or an innovative idea that can be tested. This idea always needs to tackle a concrete issue that European farmers or foresters currently face. The Austrian Operational Group 'Winter Harvest' developed the idea of testing a new market for winter vegetables.



The Operational Group 'Winter Harvest' (Austria) wants to identify suitable species and cultivation dates for winter vegetable production. Vegetables that are produced with a low energy input and that are harvested in winter can give farmers opportunities to extend their product range and increase their sales.

Winter harvest: a new innovative market in vegetable production

The innovative idea behind the 'Winter Harvest' Operational Group came from Wolfgang Palme, who is head of the Austrian vegetable research institute (Horticultural College and Research Institute Schönbrunn). The group felt that many aspects of winter vegetable production still need to be explored and more knowledge is necessary.

So before the OG started, farmers and producers were invited to fill in a detailed questionnaire to make sure that a specific topic was selected and developed according to the actual needs of the people involved. The project wants to collect ready-to-use knowledge to support farmers in producing high quality winter vegetables, and raise awareness with consumers about this unique market.

Project leader BIO AUSTRIA discussed all further steps with the project partners. The Managing Authority was contacted to clear up any questions the group had on funding and on when the call would start.

The Food Cluster of Lower Austria is supporting the OG project as an innovation broker. They give advice and offer close guidance, for instance in establishing contacts, in product development and in communication.

- More information: <http://www.lebensmittelcluster-noe.at/winterharvest>





Finding the right partners

Cooperation is central to any Operational Group. That's why finding the right partners is vital! Operational Group ROBUSTAGNO has brought together a range of partners, strongly involving farmers in all stages of the project.



Lamb mortality is a key limiting factor in sheep productivity. The French Operational Group ROBUSTAGNO (region Midi-Pyrénées) wants to find innovative solutions for farmers and sheep breeders by making lambs more robust at birth.

ROBUSTAGNO: building a partnership for sheep productivity

The French project partners of OG ROBUSTAGNO are sheep breeders, advisers and scientists, each contributing to the project with their own expertise and specific knowledge. This will ensure that the solutions identified by the project will be relevant to the sector, and that the results will be spread widely.



Jean-Marc Gautier, innovation broker and project facilitator for ROBUSTAGNO, explains: "Within the French region of Midi-Pyrénées, we first identified two departments (Lot and Aveyron) where this topic would be the easiest to develop. We also did this to stimulate regional interaction."

In each of these two departments, the project coordinators selected one:

- **farm organisation**, to put sheep breeders and advisers at the heart of the project
- **animal health organisation**, to include a veterinary point of view
- **chamber of agriculture**, to bring in practical knowledge and to spread the results to advisers' clients
- **agricultural school**, to test and transfer knowledge and innovation to future advisers and farmers

Two research units are involved in the project, the French National Institute for Agricultural Research (INRA) and the national veterinary school of Toulouse. The French Livestock Institute ('Idele') helps to facilitate, and gives communication support along the project. In addition, two regional partners, Coop de France Midi-Pyrénées (the lead partner) and the genetic promotion association CORAM (*Collectif des Races locales de Massif*) are involved in the project to ensure a broader knowledge exchange through their own networks.





Get all the details & make a plan

To make sure that all partners are on the same page and that everyone is working together to turn the innovative idea into innovation, the Operational Group application needs to contain a clear outline of the different stages of the project. Managing Authorities and innovation support services can give information and offer support with this and with completing the rest of the application. The Operational Group ENU-Wheat also made use of this option to prepare its project application.

ENU-Wheat: towards a sustainable and environmentally friendly wheat value chain



Rules on the use of nitrogen fertilisers in Germany are becoming stricter to reduce groundwater pollution. Millers and bakers believe that this will drastically reduce the protein quality of wheat flour. ENU-Wheat, an Operational Group from Hessen, is testing ways to establish a sustainable and environmentally friendly wheat value chain using less nitrogen fertiliser.

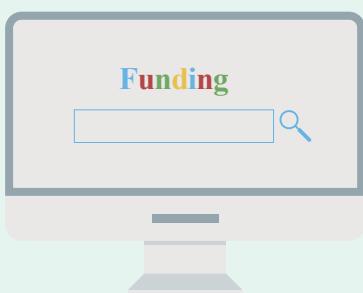
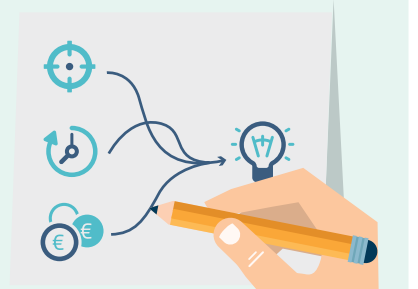


The ENU-Wheat Operational Group project started with the idea of creating a value chain that involves farmers, millers, bakers and researchers to stimulate knowledge exchange from agriculture to food production. Ludger Linnemann, coordinator of the OG, clarifies how the idea developed: "Our first step was to get in touch with our local Managing Authority. We discussed the idea with them to see whether it would fit the requirements of the EIP-AGRI. We then contacted a miller who was also interested in finding a solution for this problem, and we agreed on the steps to be taken."

On using innovation support services, Ludger continues: "Our local innovation support centre was absolutely necessary to build the project application. They answered the questions we had when developing our initial idea, and they helped us get in touch with relevant partners. We then worked with our Managing Authority to submit the application."

► More information:

<http://www.gutes-aus-hessen.de/unternehmer/innovationspartnerschaften/enu-weizen.html>





Spreading the results

Every Operational Group works towards the final step, which is spreading the knowledge that the group has collected to make sure that the results can be used by farmers and foresters across Europe. The Austrian Operational Group 'Organic dock control' is making a particular effort to make sure their results can be spread to farmers in the field and taken up immediately.

Organic dock control: rooting out dock weeds in Austrian grassland



Broad-leaved docks (*Rumex obtusifolius*) are hard-to-control weeds in grassland that pose a threat to the quality and yield quantity of cattle fodder. Herbicide-free measures tend to cost farmers a lot of time, money, and effort. The Austrian Operational Group 'Organic dock control' is testing whether docks can be controlled with the help of native clearwing moths, instead of using herbicides. The larvae of these moths feed on the dock roots, which can effectively destroy dockweed plants.

The Operational Group 'Organic dock control' strongly focuses on cooperation and knowledge exchange between science and practice throughout the whole project. Project coordinator Patrick Hann says: "The farmers involved in the project conduct practical tests on their farms. This will show us whether the method is effective and feasible, and it will help us spread the knowledge and results to the actual users. The number of cooperating farms is still growing."

To make sure that the new knowledge generated by the project can be quickly taken up and applied in practice, results will be spread through practical field tests at interested farms, and also through field workshops, presentations, a website, and different publications. A newsletter informs all partners and interested farmers about the status and the results of the project. Students and teachers from two professional agricultural schools will be closely involved in the field experiments. They can help to spread the knowledge about this new method in the respective regions, and they will be able to use it in their future professional roles.

► More information:
<http://www.melesbio.at/ampferglasfluegler/>
(the project website will be online in 2017)





Get connected

Find inspiration in the EIP-AGRI network!

If you need inspiration to set up an Operational Group, the EIP-AGRI network can offer some ideas. Results and suggestions harvested in EIP-AGRI workshops and seminars are published on the EIP-AGRI website, and the EIP-AGRI Service Point publishes a monthly newsletter with inspirational ideas and updates on events and publications. EIP-AGRI Focus Groups collect and share knowledge on practical innovative solutions to problems or opportunities in the field. They make recommendations for practical projects and summarise needs from practice that can be taken up by Operational Groups.

- ▶ Register to the [EIP-AGRI website](#) or [subscribe to the monthly newsletter](#) to stay up-to-date!

EIP-AGRI website: finding innovation everywhere

Whether you're looking to set up or join an Operational Group, or find project partners, www.eip-agri.eu is the platform you need.

- The [Meeting Point](#) allows you to look for partners, find projects that are looking for partners, or read about tried and tested innovations.
- You can also [share innovative project ideas](#) and information about research and innovation projects, including project results, by filling in the easy-to-use e-forms.

A toolkit for Operational Groups

A toolkit of relevant and useful information on OGs is available on the EIP-AGRI website in the 'My EIP-AGRI section'. [The Operational Group toolkit](#) makes use of the experiences, knowledge and skills that are building up within the EIP-AGRI network.

This online toolkit offers you:

- Detailed information on how to set up Operational Groups, on supporting networks and relevant EIP-AGRI seminars and workshops
- Links to results and contact details of ongoing Operational Groups
- Information about innovation support services and materials to help you communicate about your project and spread results
- Useful materials for promoting the EIP-AGRI

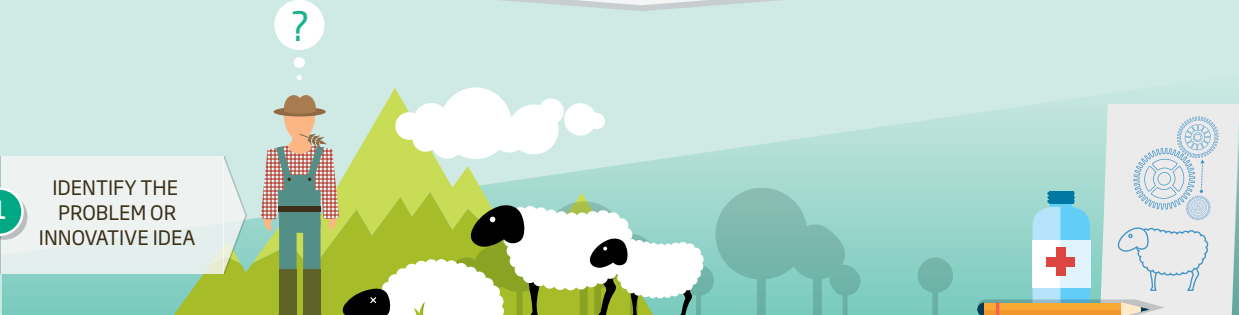
The toolkit is a dynamic portal that will grow with the contributions from EIP-AGRI network members. Please contribute to the toolkit by sending us your suggestions.

- ▶ Contact us at servicepoint@eip-agri.eu




Setting up an Operational Group

1 IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM OR INNOVATIVE IDEA



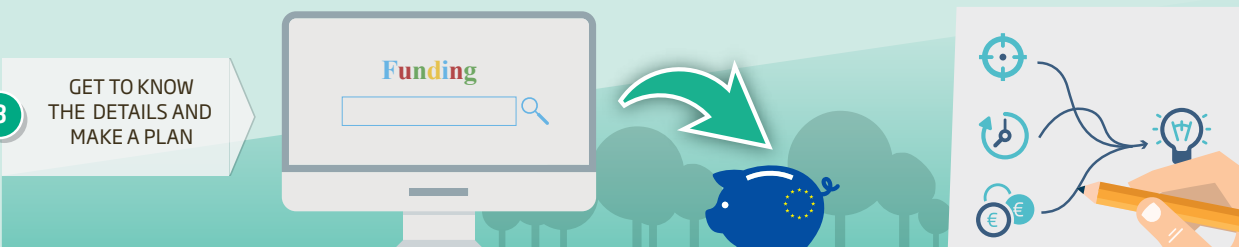
The illustration shows a farmer in a hat and overalls with a question mark above his head, standing in a field with sheep. To the right, there is a clipboard with a sheep icon and a bottle of medicine with a red cross.

2 FIND THE RIGHT PARTNERS TO MAKE YOUR PROJECT WORK



The illustration shows a man sitting at a desk with a computer. There are speech bubbles around him showing icons of people and a question mark. To the right, there are three colorful binders.

3 GET TO KNOW THE DETAILS AND MAKE A PLAN



The illustration shows a computer monitor with the word 'Funding' and a search bar. A green arrow points from the monitor to a blue piggy bank with the European Union flag. To the right, a hand holds a pencil pointing to a flowchart with a lightbulb icon.

4 SPREAD THE RESULTS

Visit the EIP-AGRI website for relevant information and useful networking tools



The illustration shows a hand holding a megaphone, a map of Europe with a network of dots, and a computer monitor displaying the EIP-AGRI logo. A speech bubble points to the website information.