

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 January 2023 and are expected to present their results and recommendations by September 2023. 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. **Applicants must be available to attend the Focus Group meeting on these dates.** If selected experts fail to confirm their availability on these dates within one week of receiving the selection message, they may be replaced. 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 after the call below. Please read the entire call text carefully before applying.

Focus Group themes:

For the current call, farmers, foresters, advisers, scientists and others¹ are invited to apply to participate in Focus Groups on the following topics, noting that these Focus Groups will complement the work of previous Focus Groups:

47: Enhancing the biodiversity on farmland through high-diversity landscape features
[More information](#)

48: Social farming and innovations
[More information](#)

49: Recovery of abandoned agricultural lands
[More information](#)

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 organisational questions, production, processing, consumption, logistics 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](#) and other innovative projects.

¹ See p. 2 section ‘Who can apply’

Focus Groups are expected to work for around one year and to meet, as far as the COVID pandemic situation allows, face-to-face/online at least twice. For more information on the Focus Groups, please see the [Focus Group brochure](#) and the [Focus Group charter](#).

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 socioeconomic 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 47: Enhancing the biodiversity on farmland through high-diversity landscape features

First meeting: 1-2 February 2023

The topic is directly linked to the [CAP objectives](#) (SO6 – Halting and reversing biodiversity loss) and the [EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030](#) that is at the heart of the European Green Deal and sets the target of at least 10% of agricultural area under the high-diversity landscape features (HDLF) by 2030. Agricultural landscape features are small fragments of natural or semi-natural vegetation in agricultural land which, compared to their relatively small size, provide important contributions to ecosystem services and biodiversity. They have long-standing historical and cultural roots in the agricultural landscapes of Europe, but with the advent of intensive agriculture, landscape features became threatened, as stated in the JRC report [Landscape features in the EU Member States](#). The topic is also linked with the identified needs to take stock of existing ecosystem services provided by farming and to restore ecosystem services where necessary.

Farmland biodiversity is related to the presence (and variety) of specific habitats –which often include landscape features such as buffer strips, hedges, ditches, field margins, terraces, dry-stone walls, ponds, isolated trees or groups of trees, patches of natural habitats that provide shelter, feeding or nesting areas for wildlife. Besides, HDLF enhance carbon sequestration, prevent soil erosion and depletion, filter air and water and support climate adaptation. While HDLF often have a value at the farm level, they also play an important role for the biodiversity of the respective rural area at a larger scale. For this reason, the presence of HDLF on farm should be enhanced but also the connectivity with neighbouring farms, forestry and other natural areas is an important aspect.

Therefore, farmers and foresters need to find innovative ways to protect, restore and maintain existing HDLF or create new ones. This Focus Group will contribute to the efforts for achieving the target of at least 10% of agricultural area under HDLF. It will do so by collecting good practices, identifying needs and barriers from these practices and proposing relevant innovative actions and research projects.

Question: How can farmers create and maintain HDLF that positively impact farmland biodiversity?

The Focus Group will carry out the following main tasks:

- Identify the challenges and opportunities for farmers in introducing more HDLF to increase both the diversity and area of habitats and/or better connectivity between habitats.
- Collect and highlight good practices and inspiring success stories, including “small changes-large gains” approaches and methodologies for introducing and maintaining HDLF at different spatial scales.
- Identify examples of valorising (from the social and economic point of view) the ecosystem services provided by HDLF.
- Identify capacity building experiences with interlinkages between learning, advice and practice and needs for implementation of HDLF.
- Suggest innovative HDLF and appropriate maintenance, including digitalisation and precision farming tools/management models essential to the value of landscapes and HDLF for wildlife.
- Identify further research needs from practice and possible gaps in technical knowledge.
- Suggest innovative ideas for EIP-AGRI Operational Groups and other innovative projects.

Focus Group 48: Social farming and innovations

First meeting: 25-26 January 2023

Social farming is an example of diversification in farming that can attract young entrepreneurs, promote employment, growth, social inclusion and local development in rural areas. In addition, social farming can contribute to the [objectives of the Common Agricultural Policy](#) and the [Long-term Vision for EU's rural areas](#). It can in particular make rural areas stronger by increasing access to social and health care services and social innovation, increasing rural communities' resilience and fostering the prosperity of rural areas through diversified economic activities that highlight the added value of farming for social economy.

Social farming combines agricultural and forestry production with the development and promotion of social services such as health and long-term care services, education and employment and thus contributes a great deal to the strengthening of social inclusion. Hence, the business models of these farms encompass activities like education, green care or therapeutic aspects for health (body and mind) and inclusion of persons in disadvantaged situations. On the one hand, it represents an important opportunity for farmers favouring multifunctional farm enterprises and the diversification of agricultural activity and income. On the other hand, it responds to community needs, benefitting not only the potential users of the services, but the whole society.

This Focus Group will approach social farming from the point of view of innovation, looking at the innovations that social farming can bring to farm enterprises and how it can benefit users and surrounding communities. Moreover, it will explore how to support a more inclusive agriculture and enhance connectivity and mutual benefit between urban and rural people. For this purpose, this Focus Group will try to identify the factors triggering the implementation of social farming models across the EU and how social farming can contribute to the innovation ecosystem in rural areas, for example by attracting other innovators.

Question: How can social farming contribute to innovation in agriculture while strengthening the multi-functional role of agriculture and connecting people from urban and rural areas.

The Focus Group will carry out the following main tasks:

- Collect and highlight good practices and inspiring success stories in social farming, which have been set up on farms.
- Identify challenges and opportunities to develop social farming models, including business models, and ways to strengthen the links between agriculture and social/health care sectors, education and employment sectors and between urban and rural people.
- Explore how social farming could bring innovation into farms and how it could benefit users and the surrounding communities.
- Identify the factors and needs to support social farming and how to build or strengthen the innovation through social farming activities.
- Propose potential innovative actions and ideas for Operational Groups and other innovative projects
- Identify research needs coming from practice and possible gaps in knowledge

Focus Group 49: Recovery of abandoned agricultural lands

First meeting: 24-25 January 2023

[According to the Joint Research Centre](#), about 20 million hectares (11 %) of agricultural land in the EU is under high risk of land abandonment. Agricultural abandoned land refers to land that was previously used for farming purposes and is now no longer managed. It has not been actively converted into forests or transformed for other uses, but instead is subject to a gradual natural process of transitioning from agricultural land to shrubs and eventually forests.

Agricultural land abandonment is frequently caused by on-site soil degradation processes such as extreme compaction, soil erosion, soil organic carbon depletion, or salinisation, but it can also be linked to changes in socioeconomic and cultural factors, particularly urbanisation and related labour market changes.

On the one hand, land abandonment has long-term effects on halting soil erosion, decreasing soil salinisation levels and regenerating the formation of soil horizons and so increasing soil functioning and ecosystem services. Therefore, abandoned agricultural lands can potentially contribute substantially to dealing with farming challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss or deforestation. However, to speed up these processes, different innovative restoration strategies and methods are needed.

On the other hand, agricultural land abandonment has short-term effects accelerating soil degradation processes. In view of the aims of the EU Mission: A Soil Deal for Europe, it is also important to look at innovative ways to prevent and remediate soil degradation in abandoned land.

In this context, this Focus Group aims to promote innovative and sustainable maintenance and restoration strategies and showcase best management practices for reclaiming abandoned agricultural land. It will focus on overcoming barriers that hinder the re-use or regeneration of abandoned land.

Question: How to foster new, practical ways for better management of abandoned agricultural land in a sustainable way?

The Focus Group will carry out the following main tasks:

- Collect and highlight best practices, approaches and methods in the process of reversion of land abandonment.
- Identify the challenges and opportunities for those dealing with land abandonment.
- Bring innovative approaches and solutions to the regeneration process and re-use of abandoned land.
- Suggest adequate socioeconomic and environmental management practices for abandoned land to decrease the risk of soil degradation.
- Identify further research needs from practice and possible gaps in knowledge.
- 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 in this text 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: 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 candidates should clearly state how and what they can contribute to the Focus Group;
- **Relevant** educational and professional qualifications – this includes practical experience – clearly linked to the specific questions for the Focus Group 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 online application form and **submit it by 19 September 2022 23:59 hrs CET** (Brussels time).

The system will notify candidates upon successful submission of the application. Please, be aware that if 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 **before 10 November 2022**. All selected experts will need to confirm their attendance at the first meeting within one week of receiving the selection message. If they fail to do so, they may be replaced.

Terms of agreement

By submitting an application, the applicant agrees on the following and confirms that:

- The applicant can easily express themselves 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 attend and, if the COVID situation allows, travel (within Europe) to the meetings of the Focus Group (the dates for the first meeting of each Focus Group are indicated under each respective section of this document). Should the nominated expert not be able to attend the meeting, for whatever reason, he or she will inform the EIP-AGRI Support Facility 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 their 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. NB. once registered to the website, it will not be necessary to publish the email address, as participants can be contacted through the website.

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

Background:

The European Innovation Partnership 'Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability' (EIP-AGRI) connects innovation actors, including farmers, advisers, agri-business, civil society and researchers, working at EU, national and regional level. The partnership aims to catalyse 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 Support Facility 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 previous Focus Groups are now closed and it is not possible to join them.

Annex 1: Draft Table of Contents for Focus Group reports



Table of contents (indicative number of pages between brackets)

1. Executive summary (1 page)
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