

# Call 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, advisers, scientists and other relevant actors for four new EIP-AGRI Focus Groups. The Focus Groups will begin their work in November-December 2014 and are expected to present their results and recommendations within 12-18 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 make themselves available to travel to the Focus Group meeting on these dates.

## Focus Group Themes:

For the current call, experts, including farmers, advisers, researchers and others are invited to apply for participation in focus groups on the following topics:

### **11: Optimising the profitability of crop production through Ecological Focus Areas**

[More info](#)

### **12: Innovative Short Food Supply Chain management**

[More info](#)

### **13: IPM practices for soil-borne diseases suppression in arable crops, both in greenhouse and open field**

[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 will discuss and document 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 12-18 months and will meet face-to-face twice a year. For more information on the focus groups, please see 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 the art of practice in the field of its activity, listing problems and opportunities.**
- ✓ **take stock of the state of the art of research in its field, summarizing possible solutions to the problems listed.**
- ✓ **identify needs from practice and propose directions for further research.**
- ✓ **propose priorities for innovative actions by suggesting potential practical operational groups or other project formats to test solutions and opportunities, including ways to disseminate the practical knowledge gathered.**

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

# Detailed Description of the Focus Groups

## **Focus Group 11: Optimising profitability of crop production through Ecological Focus Areas First meeting 10-11 December 2014, Munich**

*The maintenance and establishment of Ecological Focus Areas (EFAs) on arable land is an important element in the Greening of the Common Agricultural Policy. It is well acknowledged that the EFAs have important environmental benefits as they enhance biodiversity, reduce diffuse pollution and improve soil quality and they deliver several ecosystem services such as pollination, biological pest control...*

*This focus group explores how Ecological Focus Areas may contribute to the profitability of crop production on arable land, by identifying existing successful practices, promising research results and innovative ideas requiring further work, for instance by operational groups. The focus lies particularly on the EFAs in the category of landscape features and buffer strips.*

**Question: How can EFAs, more specifically landscape features and buffer strips and their management, contribute to the profitability of crop production?**

The focus group is expected to carry out the following main tasks:

- Identify types of management of EFAs on arable land assessing the costs and benefits for the cropping system;
- Taking stock of best practices and research that result in EFAs management practices which enhance crop productivity and profitability through, for example, improved yields, pest and disease control, soil fertility, water retention, nutrients cycling, pollination...;
- Characterize the success and fail factors for the implementation of these identified practices/methods by farmers and land owners to enhance crop production profitability through EFAs management and summarise how to address these factors;
- Explore the role of innovation and knowledge transfer in supporting the enhancement of the productivity and profitability of the crop production through the establishment of EFAs;
- Propose directions for future research and setting-up of Operational Groups

**Focus group 12: Innovative Short Food Supply Chain management**  
**First meeting: 10 - 11 December 2014 in Prague**

*Development of (the many forms of) short food supply chains is one of the approaches of the Common Agricultural Policy to improve competitiveness. There are many different types of alternative food supply chains, ranging from direct selling on the farm, farmers' markets, community supported agriculture, collective direct selling etc. A lot of good examples already exist but they are generally small-scale and limited in impact. Common characteristics are to establish a more direct relationship between farmers and consumers and to enable farmers to obtain a higher share of the value of the final sales price by reducing the number of middlemen and stages of the process. Scaling up short food supply chain management in the European Union is hampered by various factors. In this context, 'scaling up short food supply chain management' means increasing the number of producers involved and the total volumes traded through these chains. The objective of the Focus Group is to identify innovative solutions to stimulate the **scaling up** of short food supply chain management to improve farmers' income.*

**Question: How to stimulate growth of short food supply chains in Europe, both in terms of numbers of producers involved and volumes traded, to increase farm income?**

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

- Identify and analyse the different alternative food supply chain models existing in Europe.
- Identify those models that substantially improve farmers' income, and have potential for scaling up in terms of the number of producers involved and volumes traded.
- Identify the main needs or instruments required to implement these models and the factors that currently hamper the scaling up.
- Identify existing examples of how these factors can be addressed in Europe, and explore the role of knowledge transfer in addressing them.
- Explore innovative solutions to address the hampering factors and propose directions for future research work.

**Focus Group 13: IPM practices for soil-borne diseases suppression in vegetables and arable crops,  
First meeting 2-3 December 2014 - Alicante**

*Soil-borne diseases are major yield-limiting factors and difficult to control. However, applied knowledge on how to use suppression techniques seems to be limited. This focus group will bring together current knowledge of innovative techniques about soil-borne disease (fungi and nematodes) suppression and aims at practical ways to implement related research results while looking at cross-fertilisation of such methods between different vegetables and arable crops and farming systems (open field – greenhouses) .*

**Question: How to suppress soil-borne diseases (fungi and nematodes) in vegetables and arable crops and how to enhance cross-fertilisation between different crops and agricultural systems?**

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

- Identify the main soil borne diseases relevant in the EU.
- Identify the key elements that cause such soil diseases and examine how they interact;
- Identify, assess and compare different IPM systems and techniques (Physical, chemical, biological and other) that suppress soil-borne diseases taking into account the cost-effectiveness in the different systems and crops and explore cross-fertilisation between different crops and agricultural systems
- Explore strategies for a targeted breeding of cultivars that are more resistant to soil-borne diseases;
- Identify and compare alternative techniques for soil fumigation that are ready to apply or easily applicable in short term by the farmers, in the framework of the prohibition of the use of methyl bromide;
- Identify and compare according to the respective arable crop alternative soil-borne disease suppression techniques that are ready to apply or easily applicable in short term by the farmers;
- Identify farm practices that reduce the pressure of soil-borne diseases;
- Identify fail factors that limit the use of the identified techniques/systems by farmers and summarise how to address these factors and explore the role of innovation and knowledge transfer in addressing these fail factors.

## **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; and

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.

### 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 below - should be given;
- Motivation, reasoning why the expert should be 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 constituted, taking into account the 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 8 September 2014 24:00 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 accepted by 10 October 2014.

## 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's willingness and ability to share information, knowledge and experience and to contribute actively to work documents to achieving the focus group objectives,
- Attendance of the meetings: in case of a nomination, the applicant's willingness and availability 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;
- Availability: in case of a nomination, the expert will be available to attend the first meeting on the dates specified in the call; should, for whatever reason, this 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's agreement to publish his/her name along with their professional capacity (e.g. advisor, scientists, etc.) and country of residence on the Europa EIP website.

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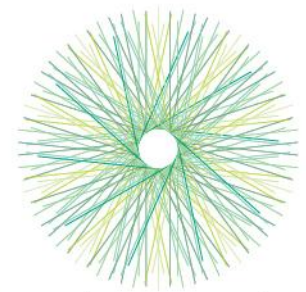
You can start your application by [clicking here](#).

## Background:

The European Innovation Partnership (EIP) "Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability" aims to provide a working interface for innovation actors, including farmers, advisors, 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 Service Point to set up focus groups on specific agricultural topics to facilitate innovative actions in the field and better connect science and practice.

The first ten focus groups on the following topics are ongoing and the call for experts for these groups is closed: 1.Organic farming (optimizing arable yields); 2.Protein crops; 3.Animal husbandry (reduction of anti-biotic use in the pig sector); 4.Genetic resources: cooperation models; 5.Soil organic matter content: Mediterranean region; 6.Integrated Pest Management (IPM): focus on Brassica species.

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



eip-agri  
AGRICULTURE & INNOVATION

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