

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 five new EIP-AGRI Focus Groups. The Focus Groups will start working in March 2020 and are expected to present their results and recommendations by January 2021. 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. **All applicants must be available to travel to 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 calls 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 for participation in Focus Groups on the following topics, noting that these Focus Groups will complement the work of previous Focus Groups:

39: Wildlife and agricultural production

[More information](#)

40: Sustainable industrial crops in Europe: new market opportunities and business models which do not replace food production

[More information](#)

41: Reducing the plastic footprint of agriculture

[More information](#)

42: Sustainable beef production systems

[More information](#)

43: Climate-smart (sub)tropical food crops in the EU

[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

¹ See p. 2 section 'Who can apply'

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](#).

What is the outcome of a Focus Group?

The specific questions and tasks per Focus Group for the current calls 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 39: Wildlife and agricultural production

First meeting: 5-6 May 2020

In many cases across Europe, farming activities might be negatively impacted by wild animals. These may include mammals, such as bears, wolves, deer and wild boars, and birds.

Wild animals can cause both direct and indirect damage to agricultural production and related activities, which may lead to heavy economic losses for farms. Direct damage includes loss of livestock from carnivore attacks, and loss of crops for example when birds eat grains and fruits. Indirect damage can include transmission of infectious diseases to livestock, damage to fields (e.g. badger holes) or infrastructure (e.g. blockages of watercourses by beavers). A number of measures to limit damage to crops and farm animals do exist but the extent of their success varies according to the specific context.

Harm to agricultural production though, is just one side of the interaction between wildlife and farming activities. In many cases, wild animals need to be protected and encouraged on farms and nearby forests as they can generate economic (e.g. hunting, recreational activities), environmental and social (biodiversity, ecosystem regulation) value. Adequate farming practices within a wider wildlife management approach can help achieve this objective. In this interplay, farmers need effective solutions that help them prevent and control wildlife damage on the one hand, while addressing the issue that certain farming practices might endanger wildlife.

Question: How to promote innovative and sustainable practices to prevent and control wild animal damage on farms while at the same time protecting wildlife?

The Focus Group will carry out the following main tasks:

- Map the most common types of damage caused by wild animals, particularly mammals and birds, on farms across Europe.
- Identify strengths and weaknesses of available solutions at the farm level that can help prevent, monitor and control wildlife damage to agricultural production.
- Identify good farming practices, within a wider wildlife management approach, that contribute to limiting harm to the local fauna.
- Identify opportunities to implement innovative solutions at farm or at landscape level through forms of collaboration (including with foresters, hunters, and others).
- Identify needs from practice and possible gaps in knowledge that may be solved by further research.
- Suggest innovative solutions and provide ideas for EIP-AGRI Operational Groups and other innovative projects.

This Focus Group will not deal with insect damage

Focus Group 40: Sustainable industrial crops in Europe: new market opportunities and business models which do not replace food production

First meeting: 13-14 May 2020

Industrial crops are crops intended as the raw material for industrial processing into non-food products. They offer new market opportunities to European farmers and support the development of a bio-based economy in the EU. Farmers growing industrial crops can be key actors in producing high added-value products such as bioplastics, bio-lubricants, biochemicals, pharmaceuticals, bio-composites and bioenergy. They can also enable farmers to improve their revenue. Entering these new value-chains often requires significant changes in agricultural business models, new investments and the interaction with new economic actors. Access to knowledge and innovation, expert advice and cooperation are essential elements for success, especially for small and medium sized farms.

As a replacement of petroleum-based materials, plant-based materials can contribute to achieving EU climate and energy targets. However, there is a concern that industrial crops may replace food production, especially if they are grown on fertile land. On marginal lands, on contaminated soils or through multi/intercropping this risk is less acute and sustainable production of industrial crops may even help territorial regeneration and potentially provide diverse ecosystems services, like improving soil organic matter and structure as well as biodiversity. The on-going MAGIC project funded under Horizon 2020 is mapping industrial crop potential on marginal lands and developing decision support systems for farmers in those areas ([MAGIC project](#)).

Against this backdrop, this EIP-AGRI Focus Group aims to gather existing knowledge and relevant practical experience and good practices in farming industrial crops on different types of agricultural land in Europe without replacing food production.

Question: How can industrial crops contribute to new market opportunities, business models and sustainable farming systems which create value for farmers in the EU, while not replacing food production?

The Focus Group will carry out the following main tasks:

- Collect practical and inspiring examples and good practices in growing industrial crops in Europe while not replacing food production.
- Identify existing value chains of bio-based materials where farmers have the potential to play a substantial role, through long-term agreements or direct participation, while considering different bio-climatic conditions, agro-ecosystems and forms of cooperation along the chain.
- Discuss strengths and weaknesses of the identified value chains, notably with regard to the diversification of farmers' incomes and the environmental performance of the holding and of the whole value chain.
- Suggest innovative business models to foster integrated links between production/business/applied research.

- Identify further research needs from practice and possible gaps in technical knowledge.
- Suggest innovative solutions and provide ideas for EIP-AGRI Operational Groups and other innovative projects.

Focus Group 41: Reducing the plastic footprint of agriculture

First meeting: 19-20 May 2020

Plastics have helped farmers in the EU to increase crop production, improve food quality and utilise resources and inputs in a more efficient way, for example through reducing the use of water, herbicides and pesticides.

Generally, plastics in agriculture can be divided into two categories, long-term use plastics and single-use plastics. The more resistant type of plastic is used for greenhouses, tunnels and irrigation systems. Single-use plastics are commonly needed for packaging, silage and mulching.

However, the use of plastics on farm can also generate undesired outcomes. When not completely removed from the fields, plastic residues can accumulate in the soil, which can have many harmful effects both on the environment and on human health. In addition, the recycling of agricultural plastics in EU is not sufficiently efficient, leaving some of the used plastics on the farms. The main problem in recycling agricultural plastics is separating the different types of plastics and the impurities accumulated in them.

Harmful effects on the environment include leakage of potentially dangerous additives, toxicity to soil microorganisms and changes in soil physical properties. Micro- and nanoparticles of plastics can also enter the food chain (food contamination) when taken up by plants. In many cases, the long-term effects of excessive plastic use and accumulation in the environment have not been studied thoroughly. Therefore, it is important to review existing knowledge and identify the most important gaps that need further research.

In order to address the problems posed by the current use of plastics in EU agriculture and to minimise the potential harmful effects on the environment and on human health in the future, actions to reduce the use of plastics on farm and to explore sustainable alternatives (such as bio-based plastics) are urgently needed. It is equally important to identify innovative ways to reuse and recycle plastic material.

Question: How to reduce the use of plastic in agricultural holdings through recycling and introducing alternatives?

The Focus Group will carry out the following main tasks:

- Identify the main use of plastics in farming activities, and their advantages or threats for the sustainability of agricultural production.
- Review existing knowledge about the impact of plastic on the agricultural environment.
- Explore opportunities to reduce the use of plastics while maintaining the economic and environmental performance of the farm.
- Identify innovative alternatives to plastic used in agriculture.
- Develop a set of good farm practices to reduce, reuse and recycle the plastic used in agriculture.

- Identify remaining research needs from practice and propose possible directions for further research on plastic use reduction
- Suggest priorities for innovative actions by suggesting ideas for Operational Groups to test solutions in reducing the use of plastics in agriculture.

Focus Group 42: Sustainable beef production systems

First meeting: 28-29 April 2020

The sustainability of the beef sector is currently the subject of lively discussion in Europe and world-wide.

According to the European Commission's medium-term agricultural outlook, beef production is expected to decrease in the EU by 2030, influenced by shrinking cow herds, low profitability, declining beef demand and strong export competition despite the opening of niche markets². Climate change is negatively affecting the sector with higher temperature and extreme adverse events, lower water quantity and quality and the emergence of new diseases.

At global level, concern by citizens about the contribution of ruminants to global warming, ethics in livestock production and care for healthy diets call into question the social acceptability of beef production. However, this trend does not take into account the difference in production models and is often associated with a lack of information or with misinformation about the environmental footprint of grass-fed animals³.

Against this backdrop, grass-based beef production systems based on agroecology principles, e.g. in low productive grassland areas, mixed farming systems and agroforestry provide ecosystem services and public goods. They contribute to improving biodiversity, sequestering carbon, developing the soil microbiome, managing the landscape, preventing erosion and forest fires. In addition, they transform resources which are non-edible to humans into human food with a high nutritional value and play a role in maintaining vital rural areas.

The Focus Group will consider innovative approaches that could provide benefits to the different aspects of sustainable beef production: environmental, social and economic.

Question: How can grass-based beef production systems, based on agroecology principles, remain sustainable?

The Focus Group will carry out the following main tasks:

- Identify practices and strategies to increase environmental, social and economic sustainability of grass-based beef production systems in Europe (including agroforestry) and collect inspiring examples and good practices.
- Discuss how traditional business models can evolve to better valorise the ecosystem services and public goods provided by grass-based beef production systems.

² https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/food-farming-fisheries/farming/documents/medium-term-outlook-executive-summary_2018_en.pdf

³ [Frédéric Leroy & Nathan Cofnas, 2019 - https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10408398.2019.1657063](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10408398.2019.1657063)

- Collect good examples of communication strategies and tools which deliver objective and evidence-based information to consumers and citizens.
- Propose potential innovative actions and ideas for Operational Groups.
- Identify needs from practice and possible gaps in knowledge related to the sustainability of beef production systems which could be solved by further research.

Focus Group 43: Climate-smart (sub)tropical food crops⁴ in the EU

First meeting: 13-14 May 2020

Cash or commercial (export) crops such as bananas and sugarcane, among others, cover the majority of arable land in the EU outermost regions⁵. Generally, these are produced as monocultures, which are more sensitive to threats posed by climate change. Moreover, these EU outermost regions are generally very dependent on imported food, which implies longer supply chains, with a resulting increased impact on climate change. More diversified farming systems can adapt better to local conditions, are potentially more environment-friendly and resilient to climate change. They can also produce a range of different foods, from staple crops, to fruit and vegetables, as well as animal products. However, these diversified systems, which include traditional subsistence/small-scale farming, are hampered by product safety demands and production costs.

At the same time, cultivation of (sub)tropical crops in continental EU regions is increasing. Spain (Andalusia), for example, produces a lot of (sub)tropical fruits such as custard apples, avocados and mangos. In other parts of the EU, specifically in the southern regions, the production of (sub)tropical crops is also increasing, due to a significant increase in European consumer demand.

Climate change and the resulting changes in temperature and precipitation may bring further changes in land suitability and crop choices, both in continental EU and in EU outermost regions. The challenge lies in sustainably increasing productivity, e.g. by promoting more sustainable and resilient production systems (other than mono-cropping systems) that are better adapted to the challenges posed by climate change.

This Focus Group aims to promote a better understanding of current farming practices for (sub)tropical crops and to facilitate knowledge and innovation exchange between farmers, researchers, farm advisers and other relevant actors in the EU continental and outermost regions. The Focus Group will focus on diversified farming systems, such as agroforestry and mixed farming, looking both at practices that increase the sustainability and resilience of farming systems, as well as the development of innovative value chains. Both conventional and organic sectors will be considered. There will be a particular focus on small farms and small and medium sized agribusinesses.

⁴ With (sub)tropical food crops we refer to food crops that are generally grown in areas with a (sub)tropical climate, and do not originate in the temperate regions.

⁵ Regardless of the great distance separating them from the European continent, the outermost regions are an integral part of the European Union. However, owing to their specific geographical location and the related difficulties, EU policies have had to be adjusted to their special situation. Currently there are nine outermost regions:

- Five French overseas departments — Martinique, Mayotte, Guadeloupe, French Guiana and Réunion;
- One French overseas community — Saint-Martin;
- Two Portuguese autonomous regions — Madeira and the Azores;
- One Spanish autonomous community — the Canary Islands.

Question: How to promote (sub)tropical crop diversification and integrated crop-livestock production systems to make them economically viable and more resilient to climate-change?

The Focus Group will carry out the following main tasks:

- Provide an overview of current farming practices of (sub)tropical crops, both for conventional and organic systems.
- Identify the challenges and opportunities for the sustainable development of such farming practices in EU outermost and continental regions.
- Propose innovative, climate-smart, cost-effective farming practices and business models relying on the efficient use of local resources and strengthening the local economy.
- Discuss the adoption potential (enabling and limiting factors) of those innovative farming practices of (sub)tropical crops in the EU outermost and continental regions.
- List research and innovation needs, and provide ideas for 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 on-line application form and **submit it by 23 January 2020 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 6 March 2020**. 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 travel (within Europe) to attend meetings of the Focus Group (the dates for the first meeting of each Focus Group are indicated under each 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 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 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 Focus 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 (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

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.