

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 April 2019 and are expected to present their results and recommendations within 12 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 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:

34: Bee health and sustainable beekeeping

[More information](#)

35: Diversification opportunities through plant-based medicinal and cosmetic products

[More information](#)

36: Soil salinisation

[More information](#)

37: Protecting agricultural soils from contamination

[More information](#)

38: Reducing antimicrobial use in poultry farming

[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

¹ See p. 2 section 'Who can apply'

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 34: Bee health and sustainable beekeeping

First meeting: 7-8 May 2019

Beekeeping as an economic activity plays an important role in sustainable development of rural areas: it creates jobs, supplies honey and other apiculture products and provides an essential ecosystem service via pollination. Pollination contributes to improving food security as well as maintaining the genetic diversity of plants.

The beekeeping sector faces problems due to the mortality of bee colonies. This is partly due to parasites (notably Varroa), infectious diseases and predators (i.e. Asian hornet -Vespa velutina). Faced with these problems, science and veterinary practice currently provide insufficient effective prevention and control.

Other stressors also affect bee health, although not all the mechanisms are fully understood. They include lack of food sources due to intensive agronomic practices, the use of pesticides and other plant protection products to deal with plant pests and diseases, etc.

Furthermore, climate change can have a negative impact on the productivity of honeybees. Plant flowering in situations of drought causes water stress and reduces pollen and nectar availability. Changes in plant flowering times and droughts can also inhibit bee movement, affect bee communications, cause physical damage of hives, colony starvation and delay bee forage activities.

Ultimately, the economic and environmental sustainability of beekeeping depends on many factors, including innovation in hive management, veterinary treatments of bees - reducing stressors where possible, diversification of apiculture products and adaptation to climatic variability.

Question: How to ensure the sustainability of beekeeping in the face of challenges linked to pests and diseases, intensification of agriculture and climate change?

The Focus Group will carry out the following main tasks:

- Identify sustainable apicultural practices and tools to cope with challenges posed by climate change and to better control pest and diseases, including harmful invasive species (e.g. *Vespa velutina*).
- Identify sustainable agricultural practices (at plot, farm and landscape level) influencing beekeeping, including non-chemical alternatives for plant pest and disease prevention and control (i.e. preventive agronomic practices such as crop rotation and use of biological control).
- Harvest the existing knowledge on ways to monitor the effect of environmental and climatic conditions, beekeeping practices and agricultural practices on bee health and production.

- Identify remaining research needs from practice and propose 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.

Focus Group 35: Diversification opportunities through plant-based medicinal and cosmetic products

First meeting: 15-16 May 2019

Many products such as essential oils, pharmaceuticals and cosmetics contain or are based on extracts from plants. Plant material for medicinal and cosmetic products can come from horticulture or wild harvesting. According to work by the Erasmus+ project Good Herbs (<http://good-herbs.eu/>) about 90% of species are harvested from wild flora and only 10% are cultivated commercially.

There are also indications that the markets for natural and organic cosmetics in Europe are developing fast², increasing the demand for plants used for cosmetic purposes. The need for plant materials used for cosmetic and medicinal purposes, combined with the need to protect plant biodiversity, create an opportunity for farmers and foresters to diversify their production and improve their income.

However, the competitiveness and sustainability of the value chains working with newly cultivated or wild managed plants used for medicinal and cosmetic products is often under pressure due to various issues. These may include lack of availability of information and technical support, weak links between the economic actors in the value chain and distrust regarding collaborative approaches, especially in marketing/commercialisation.

Question: How to create diversification opportunities for farmers through innovative value chains of plant-based medicinal and cosmetic products?

The Focus Group will carry out the following main tasks:

- Collect data, studies and existing knowledge regarding the demand for plants for medicinal and cosmetic use.
- Identify existing value chains of plant-based medicinal and cosmetic products where farmers play a substantial role. The identified value chains should take into account different climatic conditions, agro-ecosystems and forms of cooperation along the value chain.
- Identify the main actors and drivers of the value chains of plant-based medicinal and cosmetic products considering knowledge, skills, technical, legal, economic and organisational requirements.
- Assess the economic viability and environmental performance of the identified value chains, notably with regard to the diversification of farmers' and foresters' income and the environmental performance of the holding and of the whole value chain.
- Suggest innovative business models to foster integrated links between production/agribusiness/applied research.

² See for instance <https://www.cbi.eu/market-information/natural-ingredients-cosmetics/trends/>

- 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 36: Soil salinisation

First meeting: 15-16 May 2019

Soil salinisation is one of the major threats in relation to soil degradation in Europe. It is estimated that salinisation affects around 3.8 million ha in Europe.

Excessive soil salinity has an impact on a number of soil functions and reduces the yield of crops, most of which are sensitive or have low levels of tolerance to elevated salt content in soils. The impact ranges from slight crop loss to complete crop failure, depending on the type of crop and the salt content in the soils. In fact, the effects of soil salinity represent some of the most significant limitations in agricultural production.

Salinisation is often linked to lands where low rainfall, high evapotranspiration and soil characteristics impede water drainage causing salt accumulation in the upper layers. It normally occurs in coastal areas where seawater enters the aquifer and in inland areas where salts are naturally present in soils.

The problem can be aggravated by unadapted irrigation management practices, poor irrigation water quality and variations in rainfall and temperature patterns due to climate change.

Innovative water and farming practices can help to counter the problem. The adaptation to local saline conditions can also offer opportunities to differentiate locally adapted varieties in the market and obtain higher revenues. Both lines of action may contribute to compensate the productivity loss caused by soil salinisation and preserve soils for agriculture.

Question: How to maintain agricultural productivity by preventing, reducing or adapting to soil salinity?

The Focus Group will carry out the following main tasks:

- Make an inventory of European areas affected by soil salinisation and the current agricultural practices in these areas
- Identify and assess the sustainability of good and innovative farming practices from various paedoclimatic contexts within the EU, which can prevent and reduce the threat of soil salinisation or control its negative effects.
- Explore opportunities to add market value to locally adapted varieties which are (more) tolerant to salt stress so as to compensate yield reduction.
- Discuss the potential of minor crops with increased tolerance to salt stress.
- Propose potential innovative actions and ideas for Operational Groups.
- Identify needs from practice and possible gaps in knowledge concerning soil salinisation which may be solved by further research.

Focus Group 37: Protecting agricultural soils from contamination

First meeting: 11-12 June 2019

Soil is a non-renewable resource which delivers many functions that are vital to human activities. Biomass production, and therefore agriculture, is one of its seven interconnected functions identified in the EU Commission's Communication on the Soil Thematic Strategy.

Soil health plays a central role in agriculture as it determines soil fertility (and therefore yields) as well as the safety and quality of food and feed which is at the root of the food chain.

According to an article by G. Tóth et al. published in 2016, approximately three million sites are estimated to have been potentially affected by activities that can pollute soil. Altogether, over 137 000 km² (6.24% of all agricultural soils in Europe) need remediation activities³.

Soil receives substances emitted by human activities in to the air, surface and ground water or directly applied to the land. This introduces pollutants that cause negative effects on chemical and biological processes in soils (e.g. nutrient cycling, diversity of microorganisms). The most frequent contaminants of agricultural soils in Europe are metals and organic contaminants from intensive industrial activities or waste disposal as well as excessive use of agrochemicals (e.g. fertilisers).

Plants grown in contaminated soil can accumulate heavy metals and organic pollutants in the shoots and roots. When these plants are directly consumed or used as fodder for livestock and domestic animals, they enter the human food chain, threatening our health.

Question: How to prevent agricultural soil contamination and how to address the problem of contaminated soils?

The Focus Group will carry out the following main tasks:

- Identify the main soil pollutants in different regions and challenges each of them poses.
- Review existing knowledge about ways to measure soil contamination and share information.
- Identify innovative methods to prevent soil contamination in particular through improved management on farm.
- Identify a set of good practices to prevent agricultural soil contamination from various sources and to remedy agricultural soil contamination.
- Identify remaining research needs from practice and propose possible directions for further research on soil contamination.
- Propose priorities for innovative actions by suggesting ideas for Operational Groups to test solutions for the prevention of soil contamination or remediation of

³ Tóth, G., et al. "Heavy metals in agricultural soils of the European Union with implications for food safety." *Environment international* 88 (2016): 299-309.

contaminated soils and other ways to exchange the practical knowledge gathered beyond the Focus Group.

Focus Group 38: Reducing antimicrobial use in poultry farming

First meeting: 19-20 June 2019

Poultry are often raised under intensive conditions using large amounts of antimicrobials to prevent and to treat infectious diseases, such as bacterial diseases or coccidiosis. There is evidence that global levels of antimicrobial resistance, notably antibiotic resistance in different bacteria, are increasing. This is mainly due to the widespread use of antibiotics, both in the human and in the veterinary sector. Increased antimicrobial resistance may result in treatment failure for livestock, which could have serious consequences on animal health and economic results. Antimicrobial resistance also represents a severe risk to human health.

One of the main ways to reduce the need for antimicrobials in livestock is to improve animal health overall. In modern poultry production systems there are numerous interrelated factors which may reduce the risk and impact of disease and improve the welfare of livestock and therefore have an influence on the need for antimicrobials. These factors include: biosecurity, the environment provided for the poultry, availability of vaccines and stockmanship, management and animal nutrition including feeding practices.

Question: How to reduce the use of antimicrobial treatments in poultry in order to fight the spread of antimicrobial resistance?

The Focus Group will carry out the following main tasks:

- Identify innovative hygienic and treatment practices (housing systems, feeding, heating, etc.) in order to reduce or even stop the use of antimicrobials.
- Make an inventory of specific alternatives to antimicrobials including vaccination, feeding approaches and breeding. Document good practices.
- Analyse the economic implications (cost-benefit, risk, investment needs) of these alternative practices. Identify the financial parameters needed to evaluate and compare the economics of existing strategies and innovative solutions to reducing the use of antimicrobials.
- Propose potential innovative actions and ideas for Operational Groups in order to develop and explore (integrated) strategies to reduce the use of antimicrobials and protect health and welfare of livestock.
- Identify needs from practice and possible knowledge gaps which could be solved by further research.
- List good practices on how to change attitudes, habits and the human behaviour of farmers, agri-advisers and veterinarians and also on how to improve the dissemination of information.

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 at stake: 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 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 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 11 February 2019 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 3 April 2019**. 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 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 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.

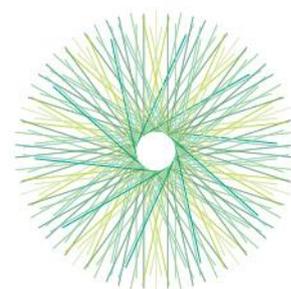
You can start your application by [clicking here](#).

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



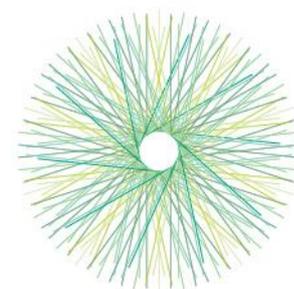
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Table of contents (indicative number of pages between brackets)

1. Executive summary (1p.)
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

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What will the EIP-AGRI Service Point (SP) provide during a focus group meeting?

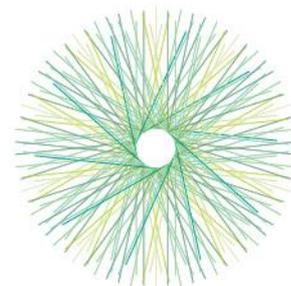
1. The EIP-AGRI Service Point provides Travels and Accommodation for Focus Groups participants. Please let us know your travel needs, dietary preferences and any other requirement via the link you find in the attached mail. We can only provide travel by public transportation. For local travel to the 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 you travel proposals based on your requirements and on what can be booked electronically by him. Please reply as soon as possible, and at the latest within 3 working days. Please check that arrival and departure times allow you to attend the whole event. Check your spam box when looking for emails from the travel agency. It often happens that their emails end up there.
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) respectively 8:00 (planes) 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. If you encounter any problem (delay, cancellation, strike...) during your travel, please contact the travel agent first.

What do I have to pay for myself?

1. The EIP-AGRI SP 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 any extra services they request from the hotel.
2. All other costs: taxi, tolls, use of private car, parking fees, local bus or metro... are not covered and cannot be reimbursed. For location that do not have public transport connection, the EIP-AGRI SP only covers the train tickets from the closest station from hometown of participants.

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UPDATE SEPTEMBER 2018



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3. Costs related to personal travel arrangements are not reimbursable (change of travel dates, different town of departure and return, ...). If the participant wants to arrive or come back on other dates than the ones proposed by the Service Point then a one-way ticket will be provided.
4. Some local travel costs (public transport) can be refunded if you make a substantiated request before the event. To do so, please reply to the mail where this document was attached to.