

Call for expression of interest for experts participating in the EU CAP Network Focus Groups

The European Commission is launching a call for experts, including farmers, foresters, advisors, scientists and other relevant actors, for three new [EU CAP Network Focus Groups](#) (FG) with a focus on innovation, knowledge exchange and EIP-AGRI. The Focus Groups will start their work in October 2024 and are expected to present their results and recommendations by September 2025. Candidates for each of the Focus Groups below are invited to apply, in accordance with the guidelines set out in this notice.

Please note that the dates for the first meetings of the Focus Groups are indicated below. **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 after having received a notification that they have been selected, they may be replaced. Focus Group participants will also be requested to do some preparatory work before the first meeting and in between the first and second meetings. No remuneration will be provided for participating as an expert in the Focus Group. Travel and accommodation will be provided by the EIP-AGRI Support Facility according to the EU CAP Network travel and accommodation policy.

You will find the link to the application form below, following the description of the Focus Group calls. Please read the entire call text carefully before applying.

Focus Group themes

For the current call, farmers, foresters, advisors, 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 ones. Topics in the current call:

53: Production of protein crops under climate change

[More information](#)

54: Local perennial plant genetic resources in view of climate change and biodiversity loss

[More information](#)

55: Alternative solutions for livestock product differentiation

[More information](#)

What is a Focus Group?

A Focus Group is a temporary group of experts with relevant expertise who are invited to share their experiences, knowledge and insights on a particular topic.

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 best (agricultural / farming) practices, 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 and dissemination to the sector, and on developing project ideas for Operational Groups.

Focus Groups are expected to work for around twelve months and meet face-to-face twice. For more information on 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 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 the 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 table of contents in [annex 1](#)) and feed into the EU CAP 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. It will also take 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, or advisors with relevant practical experience and technical knowledge on the topic, who can contribute with practical solutions to 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 53: Production of protein crops under climate change

First meeting: 20-21 November 2024

Currently, cultivation of pulses and soya bean, the main protein crops in Europe, only accounts for 2% of the EU agricultural area. Although a large share of protein crops is used as feed, there is still a shortage in the feed sector, resulting in high levels of imports². Therefore, there is a strong need to increase European self-sufficiency in plant protein, which would increase the sustainability of the EU food systems by less fertiliser use, less soil and air pollution and an increase in self-sufficiency at farm level. However, there is still a lack of knowledge and good practices for the cultivation of protein crops. Moreover, climate change, which significantly affects the cultivation of protein crops, presents an additional challenge. Simply increasing the area of leguminous crops will probably not level this deficit and would not foster the competitiveness of crop farming. To reach this objective, innovative solutions to develop an EU sustainable and competitive agricultural sector comprising new or improved plant protein sources³, adapted to climate change, are needed.

The number of EU farms growing protein crops either for their own on-farm use or to sell on local markets is on the rise. At a regional scale, there are limited initiatives to produce protein crops for locally processed products. Protein crops and especially legumes can contribute to crop diversity in Europe and bring associated benefits such as reduced disease and pest pressure, improved nitrogen management, fewer nitrogen emissions, more attractive landscapes and increased opportunities for local value chains. However, climate change brings risks to produce protein crops in Europe which will differ in each region.

The Focus Group on 'Production of protein crops under climate change' will address the SO2 (to increase competitiveness) of the CAP 2023-27⁴. The innovative solutions to introduce new or improved protein crops in the EU and to valorise protein crops in the value chain would help to diversify cropping systems, reduce European reliance on imported plant protein, and create significant value in rural regions. The FG would also aim at new sources of plant protein to ensure nutritional quality while preserving environmental and economic sustainability. The benefits of cultivating protein crops will be explored in relationship to the impact on soil health, the environment and on climate change mitigation, and it will provide some solutions for adaptation to climate change. Thus, this FG will also contribute to the SO4 (environmental care) and SO5 (to preserve landscapes and biodiversity) of the CAP. The FG will take the results of previous EIP-AGRI/EU CAP Network events and relevant projects into account and build upon them.

Question: How to increase European plant protein self-sufficiency by integrating sustainable production of plant-based protein in different value chains and regions, taking climate change into account?

Tasks

- ✓ Identify examples of new, existing and forgotten protein crop cultivation in Europe;

² [EC \(2023\), EU agricultural outlook for markets, 2023-2035](#)

³ including legumes, fodder legumes and other plants (monocotyledons and dicotyledons) that would allow to increase EU self-sufficiency in plant protein

⁴ [EU CAP Specific Objectives](#)

- ✓ Map the potential and challenges of protein crop cultivation and value chain development in different European regions;
- ✓ Assess the effect of the most promising good practices on environment, farm productivity and profitability, and identify barriers to their implementation;
- ✓ Discuss solutions and explore the role of innovation and knowledge exchange in addressing the challenges identified;
- ✓ Propose potential innovative actions and ideas for Operational Groups to stimulate the use and improvement of robustness-related practices at field and farm level;
- ✓ Identify needs from practice and possible gaps in knowledge which may be solved by further research.

The Focus Group outcomes will be disseminated via the EU CAP Network.

Focus Group 54: Local perennial plant genetic resources in view of climate change and biodiversity loss

First meeting: 27-28 November 2024

Background information

The modernisation of agriculture and the preference for standardised commercial varieties have led to the gradual disappearance of local traditional varieties of perennial crops (fruit trees, vineyard, olives trees ...). These are often neglected and replaced by more productive and uniform modern varieties. This leads to a reduction in the genetic pool of local perennial crops which are a vital component of agricultural biodiversity, essential for plant breeding and adaptation to changing environmental conditions. The preservation of local genetic resources of perennial crops makes it easier for species to adapt when the environment changes, thus helping to preserve biodiversity, ensuring food security, and enabling sustainable and resilient agriculture in Europe.

Changing perennial varieties is challenging because they have long lifespans and require significant time and resources to establish. Once planted, they influence production for decades, making the initial choice critical. Long-term factors like climate adaptability, disease resistance, and market demand impact productivity, making changes risky and deterring farmers from switching varieties.

Maintaining the capacity of farming systems to adapt to accelerating climate change and changing social expectations is a major challenge. The capacity to adapt depends on the availability of diverse genetic resources to give researchers, breeders and farmers the possibility to sustain the agriculture of the future. Plant genetic resources are an essential component of cultivated biodiversity. Maintaining them provides a reservoir of diversity from which new varieties can be selected.

The Focus Group aims to promote strategies at farm level to preserve and use local genetic resources of perennial crops and to facilitate knowledge and innovation exchange between farmers, farm advisors, researchers, and other relevant actors. The identification of existing solutions in different farming systems under different pedo-climatic zones will contribute to understanding and qualifying the socio-economic and environmental benefits.

Question: How can the conservation and utilisation of local under-utilised varieties of perennial crops be attractive and profitable for farmers and thereby contribute to biodiversity-friendly sustainable farming under climate change?

Tasks

- ✓ Identify the benefits of local under-utilised perennial varieties in adapting to climate change and maintaining biodiversity;
- ✓ Identify the challenges and opportunities for farmers in conserving and using under-utilised local perennial crops;
- ✓ Collect and highlight good practices and inspiring success stories, approaches and methodologies for maintaining and cultivating local perennial crops, covering different pedo-climatic areas;
- ✓ Identify examples of valorising local perennial plant varieties (from the environmental and economic point of view);

- ✓ Identify capacity building experiences and needs for preserving and utilising local perennial crops at farm level;
- ✓ Suggest innovative and appropriate management practices;
- ✓ Identify further research needs from practice, and possible gaps in technical knowledge;
- ✓ Suggest innovative ideas for EIP-AGRI Operational Groups and other innovative projects.

The Focus Group outcomes will be disseminated via the EU CAP Network.

Focus Group 55: Alternative solutions for livestock product differentiation

First meeting: 20-21 November 2024

Background information

The Focus Group will explore innovative solutions for differentiating livestock products, aiming to enhance market diversification and develop new business models. This Focus Group addresses the CAP's Specific Objectives SO2 (increase competitiveness - market orientation and competitiveness, incl. greater focus on research, technology and digitalisation), SO4 (climate change action - incl. sustainable energy) and SO9 (protect food and health quality - food and health, including safe, nutritious and sustainable food, as well as animal welfare). It focuses on the entire value chain within sustainable livestock systems, considering adaptation strategies to climate change, improving resilience, and meeting consumer demands and societal expectations for sustainable products.

In 2019, the European Commission proposed the European Green Deal, which was specified in the 'Farm to Fork' and 'Biodiversity' Strategies, promoting the transition to sustainable and inclusive agricultural production. The European Green Deal promotes the transformation of the EU food system to be environmentally friendly, socially responsible, capable of preserving ecosystems and biodiversity and contributing to a climate-neutral European economy (European Commission, 2019). It takes a holistic approach by focusing on the entire EU food system, from farmers to consumers, including food production, transport, distribution, marketing and consumption. Sustainability is a complementary concept to resilience and it refers to the proper performance of all system functions in the environmental, economic and social domains (Morris et al., 2011).

Nowadays, there is a growing consumer demand for "clean, ecological and ethical" products. This is driven by increasing awareness of environmental and social sustainability, health risks and animal welfare concerns. Therefore, there is a new market trend driven by consumer demand for local, fresh, welfare-friendly, seasonal and organic products and products that are specifically connected or contributing to a territorial identity. Although these types of products are receiving increasing attention, they face some difficulties in their development on the conventional market. To respond to these trends, the livestock sector must find alternative strategies for product differentiation that can diversify existing markets and foster innovative business models.

By developing alternative strategies for product differentiation and market diversification, it is possible to combine two sides of the same coin: differentiated products, based on improved and/or alternative production systems, which build a diversified market to respond to new consumer demands and derive value from them.

Question: Which approaches are there to differentiate livestock products for enhanced market diversification and new business models?

Tasks

- ✓ Identify good practices and innovative approaches/strategies/business models for product differentiation in livestock systems (intensive/indoor and extensive/outdoor systems, feeding strategies, breeding, animal welfare including space allowance and environmental enrichment, etc.);

- ✓ Identify instruments and tools to help farmers implement business models for livestock product differentiation (labelling and branding schemes, traceability tools, certification and protocols for sustainability, monitoring and KPI, etc.);
- ✓ Collect good examples of communication/differentiation solutions and communication tools to approach the market and deliver objective and evidence-based information to consumers and citizens;
- ✓ Identify research needs from practice and possible knowledge gaps related to product differentiation, and propose directions for further study;
- ✓ Explore/identify which or how ICT technologies and devices (ie. Facebook consumer networks) could help bridge this gap, especially for producers in remote areas;
- ✓ Propose potential innovative actions and ideas for Operational Groups.

The Focus Group outcomes will be disseminated via the EU CAP Network.

Selection process and terms of agreement

Each Focus Group consists of up to 20 experts: farmers, advisors, scientists and, where appropriate, representatives from industry, civil society or other relevant actors.

Experts will be chosen according to their qualifications and 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, so it is essential that group members can express themselves in English.
- ✓ Selected experts will need to be available to participate in both meetings; the date for the first meeting is provided in this text for each new Focus Group.
- ✓ Selected experts will be requested to prepare for the first meeting and complete some work 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. Any 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:

- ✓ **Familiarity** with the context of the topic: How familiar are you with the context of the Focus Group, how familiar are you with the topic or challenge of the FG and what is your vision on the topic or challenge;
- ✓ Proven **practical experience** that is relevant for the Focus Group:
 - For example, if you are a farmer/practitioner, you should describe your practical experience on the farm, related to the topic. Are you applying solutions or best practices on the topic? Are you facing any specific challenges?
 - If you have another profile, for example if you are a researcher or advisor, you should highlight how your work or experience supports practitioners in the field, or how your work is relevant for gaining practical experience on the topic.
 - Are you involved in innovative projects related to the topic?
 - Are you facing any specific challenges?
- ✓ **Knowledge and skills:** How did you gain knowledge and/or skills relevant to the topic? This includes practical experience.
- ✓ **Motivation:** Explain your motivation for being part of this Focus Group, including your expectations, why you want to take part, but also how the Focus Group may benefit from your participation, and what your contribution might be;
- ✓ **Membership** in any relevant networks or organisations;

Balancing criteria

The Focus Group will be composed taking into account a balance in the areas of expertise, professional profile, geographical and gender balance.

Application procedure

Candidates need to complete the online application form and **submit it by 16 September 2024 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 4 October 2024**. 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 to the following and confirms that:

- ✓ The applicant can easily express 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 in each respective section of this document).
 - ✓ 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 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. advisor, scientist, etc.), country of residence and email address on the EU CAP Network website.
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[You can start your application by clicking here](#)

Background

EU CAP Network Focus Groups connect innovation actors, including farmers, advisers, agri-business, civil society, and researchers, working at EU, national and regional level.

For information about previous Focus Groups, please see the [EU CAP Network 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

Table of contents for Focus Group report (indicative number of pages between brackets)

1. Executive summary (1 page)
2. Introduction (0.5 pages)
3. Brief description of the process (0.5 pages)
4. State of play (7 pages)
 - 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 pages)
 - 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