Call for expression of interest for experts participating in 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 September 2025 and are expected to present their results and recommendations by September 2026. 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 meetings 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 at the end of this document, 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 others[1] 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:

56: Forestry and forest health: new and emerging pests and diseases

More information

57: Innovative and sustainable ways to strengthen the role of farmers in revitalising the European wool value chain

More information

58: Innovative on-farm energy production systems

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.

[1] See p. 2 section 'Who can apply'

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 innovative (agricultural / farming and/or forestry) 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 in the section 'Detailed description of the Focus Groups'. 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 and results will be taken up by 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 or 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 56: Forestry and forest health: new and emerging pests and diseases

First meeting: 19-20 November 2025

Background information

Pests, diseases, and climate change are among the most urgent and interconnected threats facing forests today. Climate change affects the distribution of current forest pests and pathogens by altering the balance between host, pathogen and environment, and promotes the emergence or introduction of new species. An example is the European spruce bark beetle, one of the most damaging pests of mature Norway spruce stands, causing significant economic and ecological losses. It is becoming a new pest in countries not yet affected. Likewise, several species of the Phytophthora genus cause sudden death of tree species in large areas, decimating and disturbing forest ecosystems throughout Europe.

Climate change, and related extreme weather events are increasing the frequency and severity of pest and disease outbreaks. Meanwhile, invasive pests and pathogens continue to be regularly introduced into Europe at an alarming rate, despite existing phytosanitary regulations. This underscores the urgent need to shift from a reactive to a proactive approach, with early detection and monitoring of invasive species being crucial to prevent, slow down, or limit the spread of their invasions.

Current forest management practices are often not fully adapted to handle these newly evolving phytosanitary challenges and to the rising threats from emerging and non-native pests and diseases, e.g. lower diversity of forest species increases the risk of spread and incidence. Furthermore, there are significant differences between Northern and Southern Europe in terms of forestry, environmental conditions, forest management systems, and pests and diseases affecting forest tree species. Considering these complex and interconnected challenges, a holistic approach to forestry and forest resilience is essential. This includes exploring several options, such as diversifying forest management; promoting heterogeneous forests in terms of structure and composition; stimulating the assisted migration of forest species; and exploring the potential of non-native and unconventional tree species, which can play an important role in diversifying European forests and supporting adaptation to changing environmental, economic, and social conditions. Promoting and sharing innovative practices on management, prevention, early detection, and control of forest pests and diseases will strengthen the resilience of European forests, delivering economic, ecological, and social benefits for the European forestry sector.

Main question

How to promote the sustainability and resilience of European forests in face of new and emerging pests and diseases?

Tasks

- ✓ identify the most relevant new and emerging pests and diseases affecting Europe´s forests, and their origin

- ✓ identify and propose adaptive forest management (silvicultural) strategies and approaches to prevent the spread or appearance of emerging pests and diseases enhanced by climate change and minimise their impacts
- ✓ assess the relevance of other solutions, such as non-native and unconventional tree species – those underplanted/or underused in forestry practices to improve resilience to biotic and abiotic threats
- ✓ compile existing tools and technologies for early detection and monitoring that are fast, time-effective, reliable and user-friendly
- ✓ identify new technologies and tools for the control of pests and pathogens, including new products, biocontrol agents, and new solutions in pest/disease-tolerant tree planting material, which reduces the use of chemical pesticides
- ✓ propose operational actions to increase the social dimension in forest health initiatives through the engagement of citizens, professionals (foresters, farmers, and others involved in forest-related sectors) and scientists
- ✓ identify research needs from practice and possible knowledge gaps, proposing directions for further research
- ✓ propose priorities for innovative actions by suggesting potential topics for the EIP Operational Groups to test solutions and opportunities, including ways to disseminate the collected practical knowledge

Focus Group 57: Innovative and sustainable ways to strengthen the role of farmers in revitalising the European wool value chain

First meeting: 27-28 November 2025

Background information

The European wool sector has a long history and a rich cultural heritage. Across Europe, there are about 68 million sheep and goats at European level, with sheep accounting for around 90% (Eurostat 2023). However, the sector faces significant challenges, such as changing market conditions, improvement of sustainability, heterogeneity of wool quality, the lack of processing facilities, and the lack of generational renewal. Overall, farming of small ruminants is facing a dramatic decline across the EU.

The production of wool involves numerous actors and processes — from breeding, and flock management to shearing, washing, and further processing. All these aspects have an important impact on the quality and quantity of sustainable wool production. Sheep farmers, along with their cooperatives or producer groups, play a central role in the collection, sorting and primary processing of the wool. This requires them to be properly equipped with the right skills, and to have access to facilities and technologies that can help them to enhance the quality of their product. Moreover, wool is a raw material with several traditional uses but also promising new textile and non-textile applications. Nowadays it can be used for insulation in construction, as in agriculture and gardening as fertiliser or mulch, and as a resource in cosmetics and biomedicine. As a renewable resource, wool can play an important role in promoting circular bioeconomy by replacing fossil-based products with sustainable new wool-based alternatives.

Furthermore, sustainable wool production and sheep farming make an important contribution to the environment, rural development and overall sustainability, particularly in regions with extensive production, marginal land, or areas at risk of abandonment.

Exploring and sharing innovative practices in wool shearing, processing and utilisation, while considering animal welfare and health or traceability aspects, can play an important role in helping to improve the overall sustainability of sheep farming and the wool value chain, while also contributing to the maintenance of traditional landscapes and biodiversity. Innovation could also foster the promotion of native European sheep breeds and new ways to utilise their wool for traditional and innovative products. These developments can contribute to generational renewal in sheep farming, which is urgently needed in this declining sector. Additionally, facilitating knowledge exchange can further support capacity building to promote sustainable wool production and processing, while preserving the rural cultural heritage and helping to create a link between sustainable agricultural practices, rural community and consumer expectations. This is essential for supporting the growth of local economies and rural development.

Main question

How can the role of farmers be strengthened in revitalising and achieving a comprehensive European wool value chain that encompasses both traditional and innovative products, while establishing stronger links with the industry and consumers?

Tasks

- ✓ map the wool production and processing practices and facilities (e.g. scouring plants) available at the European level and assess their needs
- ✓ identify ways to improve, develop and guarantee the quantitative and qualitative aspects of wool supply, and address challenges related to generational renewal
- ✓ identify ways to improve wool post-harvest collection, sorting and processing to increase the socio-economic and environmental value of the process, while reducing discarded wool and raising consumer education and awareness
- ✓ identify innovative wool uses that can improve the sustainability and competitiveness of the farms
- ✓ collect and exchange innovative practices in wool production, processing and use of wool, new techniques and technologies, including cooperation approaches
- ✓ identify ways to improve market access by enhancing infrastructure such as transport, processing, storage etc., as well as cooperation with intermediaries
- ✓ analyse the needs for training, innovation, and knowledge transfer
- ✓ identify further research needs from practice, and possible gaps in the entire value chain
- ✓ Propose innovative ideas for EIP-AGRI Operational Groups and other innovative projects

Focus Group 58: Innovative on-farm energy production systems

First meeting: 18-19 November 2025

Background information

Farmers across Europe are facing rising energy costs and growing uncertainty around energy supply. At the same time, new opportunities are emerging to turn farms into energy-generating hubs — integrating renewable energy production with agricultural activity, without compromising primary production.

Innovative on-farm energy systems include technologies such as agrivoltaics, biogas and biomethane, thermal gasification, wind, solar photovoltaics (PV), and biofuels for mobile machinery. When well designed, these systems can enhance farm self-sufficiency, reduce operating costs, and possibly create additional income streams — while contributing to environmental sustainability.

Despite their potential, the uptake of such systems remains limited due to high investment costs, on-farm use and storage challenges, grid connection barriers, public acceptance, and a lack of integrated technical and advisory support. Small and medium-sized farms in particular face challenges in identifying viable solutions adapted to their context.

Main question

How to develop and foster the adoption of context-appropriate, resilient, and farmer-centred on-farm energy systems that enhance sustainability and energy autonomy, while supporting farm viability and environmental goals?

Tasks

- ✓ update and build upon findings from the previous EIP-AGRI Focus Group on energy, considering technological advances, new business models, and evolving contexts
- ✓ identify and assess scalable, low-risk energy solutions with realistic business cases and practical tools, while considering the environmental, economic and social impacts of on-farm energy deployment
- ✓ collect and share innovative practices and pilot cases across Europe, showcasing examples of agrivoltaics, biogas, biofuels, energy cooperatives, and integrated systems adapted to different farm types and conditions
- ✓ analyse key adoption barriers and ways to overcome them, including:
    - o high upfront investment and financing challenges
    - o lack of integrated advisory support
    - o land-use tensions and public acceptance issues
    - o infrastructure bottlenecks
- ✓ identify and analyse governance models (e.g., energy cooperatives, community-based systems) that support on-farm energy production, on a regional/local scale, while ensuring farmers retain ownership and decision-making power. Highlight successful examples and propose scalable approaches.
- ✓ promote knowledge transfer and capacity building through targeted training and assistance that goes beyond investment and/or technical support, to include holistic analysis and planning, taking into account their specific context, including availability of local biomass, logistics, existing infrastructure, and spatial planning requirements

- ✓ identify further research needs from practice and possible gaps in technical knowledge
- ✓ suggest innovative ideas for EIP-AGRI Operational Group projects and other innovation projects

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's 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 Wednesday 9 July 2025 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 17 September 2025**. 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, advisors, 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.