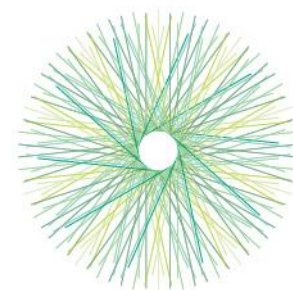


Focus Groups

NEWSLETTER MAY 2014
12 MAY 2014



eip-agri
AGRICULTURE & INNOVATION

Focus Group on Protein Crops: a two-headed challenge

Growing protein crops in the EU is generally not competitive and to improve on this more needs to be changed than the yields of the crops concerned.

The Focus Group on Protein Crops came together in 2013 to tackle the question 'How can the competitiveness of protein crops producers in the EU be improved?' Half a year later and after two meetings with the experts, they came up with some ideas. Service Point Task Manager, Remco Schreuder explains: "The market for protein crops can be divided in different segments. There is a small but increasing use of protein crops that are processed on farm and fed to animals on the farm or in the region concerned. These farms produce for local or organic markets. At a bigger (but still regional) scale different attempts to produce protein crops for regionally processed products are being made. At EU level the EU grown protein is not competitive as yields are too low compared to maize and wheat and therefore farmers have limited interest. Moreover, the infrastructure to process and market EU grown protein is not developed."

The results of the Focus Group showed that a lot of progress can be made at local scale (on farm feeding), however, progress can certainly be made in the yield for a wide range of crops and in the way protein crops are used in rotation to optimise the whole farm production. To improve the competitiveness of EU grown protein crops at bigger scales first of all (average) yields need to be improved. The focus group concluded that peas, field beans and soya offer the best potential and can all three improve substantially on yields and technical requirements (anti-nutritional factors) provided the breeding sector makes an effort. However, the infrastructure to process these crops is not developed for the larger scale protein production for processed feed. Cooperation and integration between the compound feed industry and the plant production-related stakeholders is needed to make a difference. In fact, it seems that the Focus Group brought together experts from the feed industry and plant breeders for the first time. This proved very useful in clarifying what plant breeders should aim for when developing new varieties." The Focus Group illustrated that combining the knowledge and experiences of the industry, farming practice and farming advisors can lead to new perspectives.

To conclude, there are good prospects to increase yields through breeding research but this alone will not result in the development of EU grown protein crops. Investments would have to be made in the feed sector.

[Download the final report on Protein Crops](#)