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AGRICULTURE & INNOVATION



EIP-AGRI Brokerage event 'Get involved in the EU Mission: A Soil Deal for Europe'

EVENT REPORT
8-9 JUNE 2022



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1. Executive Summary

This report presents the programme and main results of the EIP-AGRI Brokerage Event 'Get involved in the EU Mission: A Soil Deal for Europe'. It was held on 8-9 June 2022 in Brussels to support the Horizon Europe 2022 call for proposals under the EU Mission 'A Soil Deal for Europe'.

Soil pollution and contamination remain a critical issue in Europe. This is why further research is needed to understand the linkages between soil quality, soil health and ecosystem services and to assess potential for soil carbon storage. Fortunately, the increase in funding opportunities offered by the European Union is matched by a growing interest in soil research and innovation projects across Europe.

This report describes the conditions for exchanging knowledge and innovative ideas which were created within the brokerage event. It also presents how it inspired potential applicants to take part in the next EU Soil Mission Call.

The report clearly shows that the event not only helped participants increase awareness on the EU Soil Mission and the opportunities offered under the Work Programme 2022, but also helped increase practical knowledge on the concept of Living Labs and Lighthouses, and on how to prepare proposals for Horizon Europe Calls.



2. Introduction

The **EU Mission A Soil Deal for Europe** will bring concrete solutions to some of the challenges related to soil. It aims to reduce soil degradation and desertification, conserve soil organic carbon stocks, stop soil sealing, reduce soil pollution, prevent erosion, improve soil structure, reduce EU footprint on soils and improve soil literacy. The mission goal is to establish 100 Living Labs and Lighthouses to lead the transition toward healthy soils by 2030.

The **Horizon Europe Mission Work Programme 2022** was published on 12 May 2022, including a call for proposals to support the implementation of the EU Soil Mission: A Soil Deal for Europe. The info days for the Work Programme 2022 took place on 17-18 May and an online brokerage event on 19 May.

The EIP-AGRI brokerage event 'Get involved in the EU Mission: A Soil Deal for Europe' was organised to support the Horizon Europe call for proposals under the EU Mission 'A Soil Deal for Europe', with a special focus on agriculture and forestry sector. This was the first EIP-AGRI brokerage event, it aimed to encourage participants from agriculture and forestry sector to get involved in the EU Soil Mission. Specific objectives included improving awareness on the EU Soil Mission, its Work Programme 2022, and the opportunities offered under its calls; supporting future applicants in finding potential partners; and sharing further information on the call and its topics, thus contributing to improving the quality of the proposals.

To support the organisation of the brokerage event, the EIP-AGRI Support Facility carried out a portfolio analysis on soil related projects. The analysis included 159 projects funded by the Horizon 2020 Programme, Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, RDP/CAP Strategic Plans, National/Regional funding, Interreg Programmes and LIFE Programme. It contributed to disseminating the call and identifying synergies, complementarities, areas for collaboration, opportunities, and potential networking among relevant projects. It also helped identify priorities and relevant topics for this event.



3. Participation

Participants were selected based on an open call for expression of interest published on the EIP-AGRI website, in combination with the direct invitation of relevant stakeholders. The call resulted in 230 applications.

In addition, **National Contact Points (NCP)** from 10 different countries were invited to attend the event. The network of NCP is a structure established in every EU country to provide guidance, practical information, and assistance on all aspects of participation in Horizon Europe.

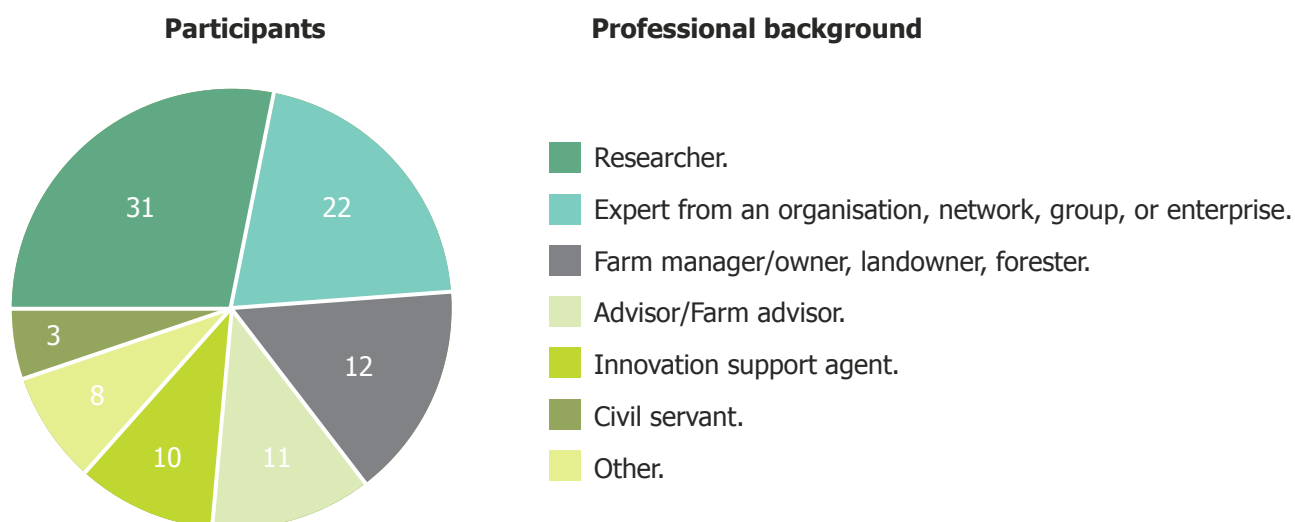
96 participants attended the event. The list of attendees was composed of 25 researchers, 17 experts from organisations, 12 farmers or landowners and 17 advisors or innovation support agents (see table below). Attendees also included 3 representatives from existing Living Labs and Lighthouses and 3 representatives of Horizon National Contact Points.

The event aimed to have people from a wide variety of countries and professional backgrounds. The number of attendees by country and background are shown in the tables below. In total people from 24 nationalities participated.

Attendees by country (excluding organising team and European Commission members):



Attendees by professional background (some participants belong to several categories):



4. Event

The brokerage event, including the field trip, lasted a day and a half. The main points of the [event agenda](#) were an introductory session with breakout discussions in the morning of 8 June, a field trip in the afternoon, a networking dinner in the evening and a matchmaking event the following morning on 9 June. All these activities were designed to foster interactions among the participants, providing different scenarios for this purpose.

The Introductory Session

The morning of 8 June was entirely devoted to an introductory session seeking to improve participants' knowledge on the EU Soil Mission and the Work Programme 2022, while providing participants the first opportunities to meet face to face.



The event started with **Hugo Almeida, Deputy Head of Unit D1 "Rural areas & networks" from the Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development of the European Commission (DG AGRI)**, welcoming participants, followed by Albin Hunia, event facilitator, providing information on the [event agenda](#) and on how the different parts of the event would work.



Orsolya Frizon Somogyi, Deputy Head of Unit “Research and Innovation” from DG AGRI introduced the participants to the concept of the EU Soil Mission.

The **EU Soil Mission** is one of the five European Missions under Horizon Europe (HE). The new HE Mission instrument addresses major societal challenges. It was officially launched in September 2021 through a Commission Communication. The EU Mission: ‘A Soil Deal for Europe’ supports research and innovation actions, contributes to improving the monitoring of soil health and soil literacy and citizen engagement and supports the establishment of 100 Living Labs and Lighthouses to test and demonstrate solutions that will lead the transitions towards healthy soils by 2030.

Living labs are places to co-create and test knowledge on the ground, with different actors coming together to find solutions to main soil challenges. Lighthouses are individual sites which demonstrate innovative solutions for improving soil health that can inspire others. Both activities can take place in urban and rural areas. In the Work Programme 2021-2022, preparatory actions are supported to prepare the groundwork for the first call for Living Labs to be launched in the Work Programme 2023. The brokerage event was an opportunity to help connect actors on soil health, including established Living Labs and Lighthouses. A brief round of questions and answers followed the presentation.

First Breakout Session - Lighthouses and Living Labs: concrete experiences

A subsequent first breakout session on Living Labs and Lighthouses allowed participants to further discuss the concept of Living Labs and Lighthouses in smaller groups while also exchanging experiences and questions. The objective of the session was to increase understanding of the concept and encourage participants to take part in the co-creation processes of Living Labs and Lighthouses within the EU Soil Mission. A practical example related to Living Labs and Lighthouses was presented in every group. Before the session, the breakout session speakers briefly presented the content of their presentations in plenary and participants divided themselves according to their interest. The breakout session started with an icebreaker where participants were asked to introduce themselves to their neighbours. Then, speakers concisely presented their practical experience with Living Labs and Lighthouses. After a brief question and answer (Q&A) round, a facilitator started the discussions by asking participants two questions: ‘Who is considering the possibility to apply for this call and plan a Living Lab/Lighthouse?’ and ‘What is the main soil challenge to be addressed?’



The following sections provide further detail on presentations, initiatives, and discussions in each of the breakout rooms.



ÖMKi On-farm Living Lab

Korinna Varga, Hungary

The **ÖMKi On-farm Living Lab**, is a living lab hosted by the Hungarian research Institute of Organic Agriculture (ÖMKi) aimed at fostering scientific research on organic agriculture and agroecology. They conduct research on crop diversification for food system stability, soil-building cultivation technologies and precision farming solutions for organic agriculture. Related with soil health, they perform analysis on species-rich inter-row cover in vineyards and orchards and test herbicide-free soil conservation tillage technologies.

In this room, most participants expressed their interest either in establishing or collaborating in the establishment of a Living Lab or Lighthouse.

Participants also shared soil challenges they intend to address, these include: soil microbiome and soil pathogens; soil structure improvement, soil resistance to perturbations and soil degradation; soil pollution and restoration; permanent and cover crops; soil fertility, P deficit and biofertilisers to replace mineral fertilisers; organic carbon stock conservation and soil organic matter; droughts and water scarcity; soil erosion; and social challenges related to soil such as soil literacy, agroecological networks and gaining farmers' trust regarding new management practices. Finally, the co-construction of research questions among researchers and farmers also emerged in the room as a proposal for bringing practical solutions to end users.

A user-centred innovation for soil management in the new CAP

Panos Ilias, Belgium



Panos Ilias, researcher at ILVO (Flanders Research Institute for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food) shared his presentation on '**The user-centered innovation for soil management in the new CAP**'. He reflected on the importance of establishing innovation focused on the end-user and presented the ENVISION service to deliver top-soil qualitative organic carbon estimations at parcel level.

More than half of the participants planned to develop or were already developing a Living Lab or Lighthouse. Participants intend to address a wide range of soil challenges such as: organic carbon stock conservation and carbon farming; decreasing soil impacts from agriculture inputs; cover crops; harmonised soil analysis, soil monitoring, decision support tools, and soil biodiversity assessment; soil erosion, fertility, contamination, desertification, salinity and regeneration of intensively managed soils; no or low tillage; precision farming; soil functions in urban environment; and knowledge communication through demonstration and experimentation.



Farming Systems Unit

Didier Stilmant, Belgium

Presentation of the [Farming Systems Unit](#) from the Wallonie Recherche CRA-W and their expertise in Lighthouse farms and living labs to overcome barriers in the reduction of tillage and pesticides.

Half of the participants expressed their interest in establishing or collaborating in a Living Lab or Lighthouse. Participants shared soil challenges they intend to address, such as soil organic matter, carbon sequestration and ecosystem services; soil in the context of climate change including droughts and water management, biodiversity, and soil fertility; livestock cross fertilisation and circular fertilisers; soil lost, soil degradation and soil resilience; no tillage and regenerative agriculture; no pesticides; soil pollution; and healthy food literacy.

Taking into account all the feedback received from the first breakout round, more than half of the participants are either already developing a Living Lab/Lighthouse or expressed their interest in establishing or collaborating in one under the EU Soil Mission. The participants are planning or were interested in addressing a wide range of soil challenges.



After the coffee break, participants returned to plenary. **Guillermo Cardon, Policy Officer at the unit 'Research and Innovation' from DG AGRI**, presented the [EU Soil Mission Work Programme 2022](#). Participants were briefly informed on the last EU Soil Mission call Work Programme 2021 and received detailed information on the upcoming topics of the current Work Programme 2022, including specific requirements for multi-actor projects and information under the [funding and tender opportunities portal](#). After the presentation, a brief round of questions was held.

Second Breakout Session - Applying to Horizon Europe Work Programme: learning from previous experiences

Then, a second breakout session was held for participants to discuss the call application process and topics. Four thematic rooms were set up for this purpose:

- Biodiversity and ecosystem services.
- Decontamination, residues and biowaste.
- Carbon monitoring and carbon farming.
- Knowledge, citizen science and soil education.

Participants were free to choose the thematic room they were most interested in, so they were clustered in such a way as to promote discussion and interaction among participants with similar interests in relation to soil challenges. Similar to the first breakout session, a speaker was assigned to every room to present their practical experience in applying to Horizon calls. It started with participants being asked to introduce themselves to their neighbours, followed by the speaker's presentation and a brief Q&A round. Then, the facilitator asked participants: 'What is your experience in applying to Horizon calls?', 'What are the key points in reaching success?'. As in the first breakout round, participants had the opportunity to write down their ideas and present it to the room by sticking the post-it in a flipchart.

The combined results of all the ‘tips and tricks’ collected during the breakout sessions is presented in [Annex 1](#).



Biodiversity and ecosystem services

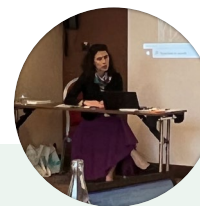
Simone Maccaferri, Italy

Simone Maccaferri presented the [H2020 CIRCLES Project](#) which aimed to unlock the potential of microbiomes for sustainable food production. He also presented suggestions on how to create a competitive proposal for Horizon: adopt a full chain approach in the project that might leverage co-creation of solutions among all stakeholders involved, an open science approach ensuring free access of results for all stakeholders and including a specific science-to-companies knowledge translation phase, communication and public engagement and settle a reliable consortium.

Participants in the room discussed the success factors for Horizon application. These include to request enough funding, to meet with researchers and farmers, supporting end-users, project size according to objectives and affordable by partners and the importance of a strong leader partner, knowledge transfer, taking care of the narrative when writing the proposal easing reading and comprehension, reading carefully and understanding the call text, ensuring outcomes are relevant, keeping balance of different parts, follow-up, the project partnership and the quality of the proposal.

Decontamination, residues and biowaste

Natalia Shukadarova, Bulgaria



Natalia Shukadarova presented the practical experience from the [NGPA participation in Horizon 2020 proposal](#) with the LIMA Initiative which aimed to promote agroecology and reduce dependence on agricultural inputs such as pesticides, reducing the losses of nutrients from fertilisers and moving towards zero pollution of water, soil and air. Despite the fact that the LIMA project was finally not retained for funding, Natalia shared her experience and some lessons learned with participants. She suggested to start by being a partner instead of a project leader, having a clear focus on the project objectives and goals, and implement a proactive management of the team.

Following the Q&A round, an open discussion on how to prepare a good proposal was held. Some ideas that emerged from the debate were: stimulate market driven innovation, provide economic stimuli for adopting ecological practices, be aware that there might be very little time to prepare the proposal, strong coordination among partners is needed, need to link the implementation phase with expected impacts, have a well-established consortium, be ambitious, arrange to have experienced administrative support in preparing proposals for calls, have a network of stakeholders, consider the innovation triangle, have a clear understanding of the call topics and think about how to involve SMEs.

Carbon monitoring and farming

Pilar Andrés, Spain



Pilar Andrés in her presentation on [Knowledge co-construction in an uncertain world \(lessons learned from landscapes in crisis\)](#) showed to participants ideas on how to engage farmers, shared important knowledge gaps, key issues on how to transform metropolitan agricultural landscapes into climate robust and sustainable food production areas. She also shared some tips on how to approach Horizon calls, among them: finding a call that fits your project, ensuring a good understanding of the topic of your interest, follow the EU info days and policy debates, have a solid consortium, consult previous research projects, and make your work and results desirable.

A discussion on what is necessary to succeed in a Horizon call was held. Some of key topics discussed were: paying attention to the call manual and making a strong partnership.



Knowledge, citizen science and soil education

Daniel Ács, Slovakia

Daniel Ács in his presentation [Contributions to a Soil Deal for Europe](#) showed the work and projects of the Bioeconomy Cluster and shared with participants some tips on building a strong partnership and proposal. Among them: benefit from existing sources and tools (NCP, Funding and Tenders Portal, platforms, newsletters, etc), add value (bring practical examples and solutions, take part in meetings and discussions) and some basics and personal advice (networking as a lifestyle, don't be afraid of new ideas, be honest about what you don't know).

Participants discussed tips to prepare good proposals for Horizon calls. Some of the ideas that emerged were: become an evaluator to understand how proposals are assessed, pay attention to evaluation criteria because sometimes they are difficult to understand, do not be afraid to try, be part of European groups (i.e. EIP-AGRI Focus Groups), build a strong and reliable consortium and pay attention to communication skills (i.e. English language is needed, write legible texts, etc).

Field trip

A field trip was organised to show participants a centre which is working as living lab and to provide participants with additional opportunities for informal interaction.

Participants visited the 'Praktijkpunt Landbouw Vlaams-Brabant' in the town of Herent, north-east of Brussels. This centre performs a variety of activities including research on chicory and innovative cultivations with a focus on sustainability, soil and water quality and developing knowledge to support farmers on practical questions. They are also an information and training point organising information days on many agricultural topics.

Participants were divided in two groups attending two parts of the visit alternatively. One part was an introduction to the centre and their activity, held by the director Tim de Clercq. It included an introduction to chicory cultivation and a visit to the fields, where research in experimental cultivations is being carried out.



The second part led by the soil researcher Mieke Vandermeersch showcased **practical experiences on soil** research in the experimental fields surrounding the centre. These experiences were related with sustainable cultivation through improved soil management, carbon storage for a better soil by recycling material as mulch and long-term field trials on reduced tillage versus ploughing.



Soil researcher Mieke Vandermeersch explaining soil research experiences.

The visit provided an opportunity for participants to familiarise themselves with a centre organised as a living lab and to interact in an informal setting.

Matchmaking activity

The morning of 9 June was entirely devoted to matchmaking, aimed to get participants to know each other, further discuss the call topics and explore possibilities for future partnerships. The session started with the programme presentation and instructions held by main facilitator Albin Hunia, including a brief round of feedback from the day before. After that, different spaces and dynamics provided participants with different settings for their meetings.

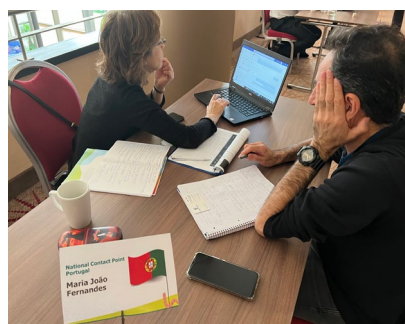


The main matchmaking activity took place in the plenary room where high tables were available for one-on-one meetings. Through the registration app participants could plan meetings during the one-on-one session before the event took place. Through this system, around 70 out of a total 90 possible meetings were held. In addition, the plenary had four round tables for participants to sit around and have informal discussions. The space was also used for meetings arranged on the spot, supported by the organisational team.



Outside the one-on-one meetings in the plenary, additional spaces were available for interaction. In the four breakout rooms, meeting corners were also available to hold meetings in bigger groups, participants used the spaces during the morning for informal meetings.

In addition, Horizon NCP had available desks in the lobby to hold meetings with participants. The representatives of three NCP from Ireland, Netherlands and Portugal attended the event. They supported, advised, and assisted participants on every aspect of the Horizon Work Programme, supporting them with the preparation of the call, providing clarification on the Work Programme 2022 and giving information on the application process.



The participation of NCP in the event attracted a lot of attention from participants, either to gather information on the NCP support or on the Horizon Calls application process. For upcoming events, the involvement of NCP representatives to support participants on the spot is highly recommended.

To finalise the event, participants shared their impressions in plenary and completed the evaluation poll. Hugo Almeida, Deputy Head of Unit "Rural areas & networks" from DG AGRI, closed the event thanking all participants for their active contributions.



5. Evaluation poll main findings

The evaluation poll was filled in by 65 out of 80 participants. Almost all of respondents (97%) were satisfied with the format and organisation of the event.

There was a good balance of experienced people in Horizon calls and newcomers. Just over a half of the respondents, 58.5% had applied for Horizon calls in the past. However, most of the participants were newcomers to the EU Soil Mission, 83.1% were not involved in a consortium that had applied to the Work Programme 2021. This illustrated the capacity of the brokerage event to involve newcomers in the EU Soil Mission.

The event proved to be very useful for matchmaking. Almost all respondents (90.8%) found interesting possibilities for future consortia and all of them (100%) would be interested in joining similar events in the future. Most participants made at least 3 contacts they plan to follow up after the event and almost half of participants met more than 3 farmers during the matchmaking session.

Participants addressed a wide variety of topics related to soil during the event, as it was shown in the breakout session reports. The most addressed topics according to participants were Living Labs and Lighthouses, carbon farming and monitoring, and biodiversity and ecosystem services. These previous topics were addressed by more than a half of the participants. At least a third of the participants addressed soil improvements through residues and fostering soil education. The less-addressed topics were CAP and voluntary agri-environmental measures, organic matter evaluation and aspects of global soil degradation.

6. Conclusions

The brokerage event was entirely devoted to improving awareness on the EU Soil Mission, its Work Programme 2022 and the opportunities offered under its call, succeeding in call promotion and in triggering innovative ideas for proposals. It created an interactive ecosystem for participants to exchange information on the call and its topics. The event also contributed to an improved understanding on the EU Mission and the call through different presentations, breakout discussions and meetings with Horizon NCP.

The participants selection process managed to create a group of people encompassing a wide range of European countries, including a balance of different professional backgrounds. Selected people proved to be very interested in matchmaking, as they were very active in all parts of the programme.

The event succeeded in creating an adequate atmosphere for participants to get in touch with each other and discuss with potential partnerships. A variety of activities and the facilitation style contributed decisively to encourage participants to intervene and interact in many forms and to create a relaxed, informal atmosphere.

The development of the event and participants feedback provided some new ideas to improve the process for upcoming events, focusing on making the brokerage activity smoother and easier for participants and further fostering interaction among them. Many of the ideas and improvements concerned ways to support the interaction among participants, both before, and during the event.

The brokerage event was an opportunity for participants to know more about the Horizon Calls, to find new partners, to further develop topics for proposals and to involve newcomers, thus making this kind of event a very desirable tool to support other calls in the future.

All presentations and background documents are available on the EIP-AGRI website:

<https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/event/eip-agri-brokerage-event-get-involved-eu-mission>



Annex I

Tips and Tricks on 'How to prepare a good proposal to Horizon Calls'

The EIP-AGRI brokerage event 'Get involved in the EU Mission: A Soil Deal for Europe' aimed at encouraging participants from agriculture and forestry sector to get involved in the EU Mission 'A Soil Deal for Europe', improving awareness on the Mission, its Work Programme 2022 and the opportunities offered under its calls, and supporting future applicants in finding potential partners.

The second breakout session was devoted to discussing on call topics and application process contributing to improve the quality of the proposals. This annex summarises the ideas shared by participants in the session organised by the main steps in the process.

Get informed:

- Make use of Horizon National Contact Points ([NCP Net \(Home | Horizon Europe NCP Portal\)](#)).
- Consult the Funding & Tenders Portal ([Funding & tenders \(europa.eu\)](#)).
- Keep up to date on running projects ([Horizon 2020 – Horizon Europe](#)).
- Consult platforms and newsletters ([EIP-AGRI Newsletters](#)).
- Be part of European groups ([EIP-AGRI Focus Groups](#)).

Understand the call:

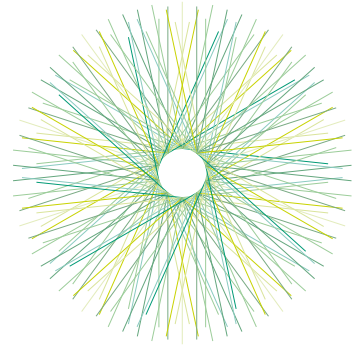
- Find a call that fits your project, do not try to adapt your project to the call.
- Understanding the topic of the call is essential. Reserve sufficient time for reading the call text and the evaluation criteria.
- Participate in the EU info days.
- Keep up to date on EU policy debates.

The consortium:

- It is important to set up a solid and reliable consortium. A strong coordination and leadership of the consortium is needed.
- Establish a proactive managing of the team.
- If it is your first proposal, consider starting as a partner rather than as consortium leader.
- A consortium which is too large may also have downsides.
- Management and communication skills are important. English language is required.
- Share tasks among partners. A partner focused on project management allows other partners to focus on the content.
- Professional experts are available to help you. Consult research institutions and organisms.
- Meet with farmers and take them on board of your project when feasible.
- When searching for a consortium, start from zero, learn and grow.
- Make networking your lifestyle.
- Invest time in fruitful meetings and discussions.

Write the proposal:

- Consult previous research projects.
- Make your project and results desirable.
- Bring practical examples/solutions.
- Reflect and demonstrate expected impact of project activities.
- Take into account end users (farmers, rural stakeholders, ...).
- Be honest about what you don't know.
- Don't be afraid of new ideas. Be ambitious.
- Be ahead of new policies in your country/region.
- Become an evaluator. Think like a Horizon evaluator would think.
- Prepare a qualitative proposal.
- Have a full chain approach as it might leverage co-creation.
- Have an open science approach based on communication and public engagement, science-to-companies exchange.
- Be aware of the project size.
- Carry out a follow-up of the process, learn and improve based on feedback received.



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The European Innovation Partnership 'Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability' (EIP-AGRI) is one of five EIPs launched by the European Commission in a bid to promote rapid modernisation by stepping up innovation efforts.

The **EIP-AGRI** aims to catalyse the innovation process in the **agricultural and forestry sectors** by bringing **research and practice closer together** – in research and innovation projects as well as through the EIP-AGRI network.

EIPs aim to streamline, simplify and better coordinate existing instruments and initiatives and complement them with actions where necessary. Two specific funding sources are particularly important for the EIP-AGRI:

- the EU Research and Innovation framework, Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe,
- the EU Rural Development Policy under the CAP.



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