



**Integrating agroecology
with the downstream:
food value chains**



AGRI summit 2019
Innovation

EIP AGRI Focus Group

Mixed Farming Systems: Livestock/Cash crops

Subject of the Focus Group

How to develop livestock/cash crop interactions and promote their benefits as a sustainable alternative to farm or regional specialisation?

Context for the Focus Group

The specialisation and intensification of European farming systems has raised sustainability concerns such as degradation and depletion of natural resources, low resilience to climate change and a high dependence on global markets. Integrating crops and animal production either on farm or between farms at a regional level can be a way to tackle these issues. However, managing a more complex system demands more knowledge and labour.

Key Questions

Focus Group experts reflected upon current information on mixed farm system (MFS) in Europe, to understand under which conditions MFS should be promoted as a suitable alternative to specialisation. The type of MFSs considered by the FG are those including at least one type of cash crop and one type of livestock production at farm or at regional level, including MFS based on the exchange of resources between specialised crop and livestock farms.

Main Findings

The FG produced 3 main recommendations to maintain existing MFS and take advantage of mixed farming practices to increase the sustainability of specialised farms and agricultural regions:

- 1.** Adapt educational and advisory systems to the specificities of MFS by promoting knowledge exchange and considering more holistic approaches and strategic management
- 2.** Enhance regional integration by enabling cooperation between specialised farmers
- 3.** Consider the “multifunctional product basket” provided by MFS to add value to MFS products and make mixed farming more attractive to farmers

Ideas for Operational Groups

Addressing labour management by testing new managerial solutions found by farmers to deal with complexity and risk in MFS.

Improving soil quality by identifying available best practices of MFS and discussing on farm to optimise soil quality in different pedo-climatic areas.

Assessing and improving technical efficiency by developing, with farmers, a locally adapted multicriteria evaluation to assess the sustainability of MFS and identifying best practices to optimise energy and nutrient cycles.

Enhancing marketing strategies to add value to MFS products and integrate specificities of MFS into already existing value chains.

Research needs from practice

Develop a framework of relevant indicators to evaluate economic and environmental benefits of adopting MFS as compared to specialised farming systems.

Develop tools to assess labour requirements and management complexity of MFS.

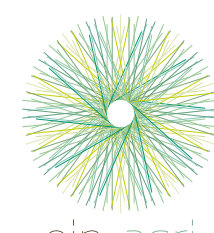
Make an inventory of existing successful MFS in Europe to identify pedo-climatic and economic conditions where MFS have a higher performance than specialised ones.

Explore successful combinations of agronomic practices to increase technical efficiency of MFS (e.g. crop diversification, rotation design, crop varieties, etc.).

Explore collective organisation, logistics and management strategies to foster cooperation between farmers to establish MFS at regional scale.



All findings from the Focus Group and more ideas for Operational Groups and research needs are available in the final report on the EIP AGRI website: <https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en>.



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